Environmental sustainability in development cooperation

Analysis of the territory of Gipuzkoa

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Environmental sustainability in development cooperation. Analysis of the territory of Gipuzkoa

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List of aconyms

AAPP:	Public Administrations
ODA:	Official Development Assistance
DAC:	Development Assistance Committee
CAPV:	Autonomous Community of the Basque Country
CRS:	Creditor Reporting System
DFG:	Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa
EpTS:	Education projects for Social Transformation
SSE:	Social and Solidarity Economy
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goals
NGDO:	Non-Governmental Development Organisation
THG:	Historical Territory of Gipuzkoa
UPV/EHU:	University of the Basque Country

Executive summary

The **main objective** of this report is to conduct an assessment on the integration of environmental sustainability in development cooperation in Gipuzkoa. From this diagnosis, a series of recommendations are provided which could help establish the action lines that would be most effective in the near future within the scope of cooperation in this region.

The process of this assessment combined various **methodological tool**s, both quantitative and qualitative. The diagnosis carried out was complemented by a SWOT analysis. In addition, diverse **sources of information** were used:

(1) Regulations and planning instruments: The analysis of the regulatory framework was carried out based on various laws and planning documents from both the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV) and Gipuzkoa.

(2) Basque Public Cooperation Portal: The analysis of public funds allocated to environmental sustainability within the framework of development cooperation was conducted using data available from this portal. The analysis covered the period from 2016 to 2022 and included funds allocated to NGDOs in Gipuzkoa by the main Basque administrations.

(3) Cooperation projects submitted to DFG calls: All projects with an environmental perspective that participated in annual calls between 2016 and 2023 were analysed, whether they received funding or not. A distinction was made between Development Cooperation projects and Education projects for Social Transformation(EpTS).

(4) Survey of NGDOs in Gipuzkoa: The survey was sent to 76 NGDOs, with a response rate of 34%. The analysis was structured around three blocks: external factors that limit the incorporation of environmental sustainability; internal factors; and potential opportunities for incorporating the environmental sustainability perspective.

(5) Interviews with cooperation agents in Gipuzkoa: The same topics as in the survey were addressed (external and internal factors, and opportunities). Two types of agents were interviewed: on the one hand, representative NGDOs from Gipuzkoa (6 interviews), and on the other hand, the main public administrations involved in cooperation in Gipuzkoa (3 interviews).

The main **conclusion** of the diagnostic analysis is that the **level of integration of environmental sustainability** in development cooperation in Gipuzkoa is **very limited**. This low level of integration contrasts with the significant challenges posed by ecological and sustainability issues both locally and globally. Therefore, if Gipuzkoa's cooperation policy aims to address these challenges, it must undergo a **transformation towards an ecological and sustainability-focused approach**.

The **most notable results** of the different areas of analysis addressed are the following:

- The presence of environmental sustainability in the planning instruments of both the CAPV and Gipuzkoa, in general, is rather marginal. The environmental approach is not mainstreamed and, in addition, environmental sustainability is aligned with the principle of weak sustainability.
- The funds allocated to environmental sustainability within the framework of Gipuzkoa's cooperation in the period 2016-2022 are very scarce.
- The orientation and scope of cooperation projects with respect to environmental sustainability, overall, is quite limited.
- In general, both NGDOs and public administrations show a significant willingness to change towards greater integration and the strengthening of environmental sustainability in cooperation.

The **recommendations** offered are **summarised** as follows:

- Leverage the Law 3/2024 on Cooperation and Solidarity, which presents a valuable opportunity to advance socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice.
- Adapt the DFG Development Cooperation Master Plan 2021-2030 to current trends and transformations, and also adjust the project scoring criteria in terms of socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice.
- Create a specific cooperation project line dedicated to socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice.
- Promote projects with complementary agent structures to integrate specialised knowledge from both the cooperation and sustainability sectors.

- Promote longer-term projects and develop a methodological framework for *ex-post* environmental impact evaluation of the projects.
- Offer specialised training courses for both NGDOs and public administration staff.
- Strengthen a collective space for reflection through dialogue and exchange of experiences between different agents.

1. Introduction

1.1. Context and justification

One of the main global challenges is undoubtedly the **eco-social crisis** we are facing, which also extends to the field of cooperation. Our entry into the Anthropocene signals that human impact on the Earth system is unprecedented, with some environmental consequences now irreversible, while others present uncertain outcomes for the future. Climate change is an example of this, as the window for mitigation continues to shrink while adaptation is urgently needed. Beyond climate change, the transgression of 6 out of 9 scientifically established planetary boundaries, such as biodiversity loss and biogeochemical flows (phosphorus and nitrogen) (Richardson et al., 2023), is further evidence of the eco-social crisis on a planetary scale. At stake is the provision of a safe living space for the majority of the world's population (O'Neill et al., 2018).

Ecological disparities are significant within the framework of the North-South dialectic, with both the causes and consequences being unequal. In general, wealthy countries are the primary contributors to the ecological impacts generated on a global scale, while the consequences of these are felt more acutely by poorer countries. Climate change serves as a prime example; historically (1850-2020), the regions responsible for the highest CO_2 emissions are North America and Europe, with 27% and 22% respectively, far exceeding those of Latin America (6%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (4%) (Chancel et al., 2022). Yet, it is in the poorest regions where the most severe consequences of climate change are experienced (forced migrations, impacts from extreme weather events, changes in agricultural structures, etc.). This phenomenon is also consistent with the fact that, within each region globally, the wealthiest segments of the population are responsible for the majority of greenhouse gas emissions (ibid.).

This eco-social emergency poses a significant **challenge** for the field of **cooperation**. One of the main dilemmas is whether cooperation should focus on addressing the root causes of the ecological crisis or, alternatively, on mitigating its consequences (Carrillo, 2021). The first approach would primarily target wealthy countries, where energy and material consumption would need to be reduced, citizens' consumption habits changed, and multinational corporations would need to shift towards less impactful business models. This course of action could be aligned, depending on specific goals and context, with Education projects for Social Transformation (EpTS), which are mostly implemented in our immediate surroundings. The second approach, however, would advocate for interventions in so-called developing countries, where, through on-the-ground cooperation projects, some of the ecological consequences could be mitigated. In this case, efforts might focus on restoring and strengthening family

farming and agroecology, stabilising rural populations by promoting sustainable livelihoods, or restoring forests and ecosystems.

This debate is particularly relevant, especially given the deep questioning of the effectiveness of development aid (Unceta, 2012; Freres et al., 2016). It is true that development aid aimed at environmental sustainability has become an instrument to mitigate North-South ecological inequalities. For example, total bilateral aid from the OECD related to climate change amounted to $22.6 billion in 2010, representing around 15% of total official development assistance (ODA); of this total, approximately two-thirds were allocated to mitigation and one-third to adaptation (Victor, 2018). However, the effectiveness of development aid for environmental sustainability has also been questioned (Huang and Pascual, 2018). This effectiveness depends on several common factors, such as donor commitment, harmonisation, and cooperation between donors and recipients, given the multitude of initiatives and programmes across different sectors (in addition to climate change: energy, agriculture, forests and biodiversity, and urban development).

Environmental mainstreaming is the informed inclusion of environmental considerations in the decisions and institutions that shape national, sectoral, and local development policies, regulations, plans, investments, and actions (Dalal-Clayton et al., 2009). In the context of development cooperation, it is defined as the "integration of cross-cutting priorities into cooperation policies, programmes, or interventions at all stages, from planning to evaluation" (Freres et al., 2016). These priorities typically include social inclusion and poverty reduction, the promotion of human rights and democratic governance, gender in development, environmental sustainability, and respect for cultural diversity (ibid.).

Environmental mainstreaming is an approach that has gained prominence over the years, especially considering the eco-social crisis referred to above, although there is still room for greater integration (Marcellesi and Palacios, 2008). Environmental mainstreaming is significant in that its effective integration into cooperation policies can, among other things, ensure the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services (González, 2008). In fact, the deterioration and destruction of ecosystems directly impact not only the livelihoods of numerous communities –affecting efforts to combat poverty– but also overall human well-being (Duraiappah, 2004). Therefore, addressing environmental sustainability is not only a commitment to future generations but also a responsibility in the fight against poverty and inequality for current generations.

The perspective of environmental sustainability has been present in international development agendas for some time, particularly in recent years within the framework of

Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (DFG), like other local administrations, has included its commitment to addressing environmental degradation in its successive plans. In the field of development cooperation, this **commitment** is expressed in: (i) the DFG's Development Cooperation Master Plan 2021-2030; (ii) the criteria for evaluating projects submitted for funding calls, and; (iii) various initiatives currently underway, such as direct cooperation proposals in interdepartmental collaboration within the DFG.

Thus, the urgent need to address the issue is compounded by the presence of an environmental sustainability approach in both the DFG's strategic planning and initiatives, as well as in the goals and actions of Gipuzkoa's NGDOs.

1.2. Objectives and scope

In accordance with the above, the **main objective** of this report is to conduct a diagnosis of the integration of environmental sustainability within the framework of development cooperation, specifically in the territory of Gipuzkoa. The aim is to provide an updated view of the extent to which the environmental sustainability approach is integrated into Gipuzkoa's development cooperation policy. Based on this diagnosis, the results of this report can help establish the most effective lines of action for the near future in the field of cooperation in this territory.

Thus, the **secondary objectives** are as follows:

1. Analyse, from the perspective of environmental sustainability: (i) the regulations and planning instruments; (ii) the public funds allocated, particularly in the territory of Gipuzkoa; and (iii) the development cooperation projects submitted to the DFG's calls for proposals.

2. Identify the reasons that hinder the incorporation of the environmental sustainability approach in development cooperation projects, both from the NGDOs of Gipuzkoa and the public administration.

3. Identify the existing potential for effective integration of environmental sustainability by both the public administration and the NGDOs of Gipuzkoa.

4. Develop a set of recommendations to advance Gipuzkoa's development cooperation policy in strengthening the environmental sustainability approach.

As mentioned, the purpose of the report is to provide a series of recommendations and potential lines of action for the near future, although its **scope** is non-binding. These recommendations are primarily aimed at the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (DFG) as it is the main funder in the territory, but they may also be of interest to other cooperation agents (NGDOs, other public administrations), both within Gipuzkoa and the Basque Country (CAPV).

1.3. Structure

The report consists of five main sections. Section 2 details the methodological framework and the sources used. Section 3 covers the bulk of the analysis, divided into three parts: the review of regulations and planning instruments; the analysis of public funds allocated to cooperation; and the development cooperation projects submitted to the funding calls promoted by the DFG. Section 4 examines the assessments made by Gipuzkoa's cooperation agents, including NGDOs and various public administrations operating in the territory. Section 5 presents the results of the analysis along with a general evaluation, which is complemented by a SWOT analysis. The report concludes with Section 6, which contains the conclusions and recommendations.

2. Methodology and sources

This report followed a development process that combines various methodological tools, both quantitative and qualitative. The information used was taken from diverse sources. We now detail the information sources as well as their methodological and analytical treatment. The diagnosis conducted was complemented by a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), a widely used methodology that serves as an analytical tool for strategic planning and aids in decision-making for organisations of various kinds[1].

Regulations and planning instruments

The analysis of the regulatory framework was conducted using various regulations and planning documents from different administrative levels. Although the scope of the report is limited to the territory of Gipuzkoa, documents applicable to the entire Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV) were also reviewed to ensure appropriate regulatory context.

For the CAPV, the following documents were examined: Law 1/2007, of February 22, on Development Cooperation; the Report on the Basque Law of Development Cooperation, prepared by Koldo Unceta; the Draft Basque Law on Cooperation and Solidarity; Law 3/2024, of February 15, on Cooperation and Solidarity; and the IV Director Plan for Development Cooperation 2018-2021. Additionally, the Director Plan of the Basque Coordinator of NGDOs was analysed which, despite not being a regulatory text, serves as a sector reference.

In the case of Gipuzkoa, on the one hand, the general and specific regulatory bases for the granting of subsidies for development cooperation for the period 2016-2023 were analysed. On the other hand, its planning instruments for cooperation were analysed, in accordance with the following documents: Strategic Framework for Action of Development Cooperation of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, and the Master Plan for Development Cooperation of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa 2021-2030, the latter being the plan currently in force.

1 For further methodological details, visit the website Community Tool Box (https://ctb.ku.edu/es). URL: https://ctb.ku.edu/es/tabla-de-contenidos/valoracion/valorar-las-necesidades-y-recursos-comunitarios/FODA-analisis/principal [last accessed on 14/05/2024].

Basque Public Cooperation Portal

The quantitative analysis of public funds allocated to environmental sustainability within the framework of development cooperation has been based on the data available from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal (https://euskalankidetza.hegoa.ehu.eus/). According to the available information, the analysis covers the period from 2016 to 2022 and includes funds allocated to NGDOs in Gipuzkoa by the main Basque administrations at various levels: the Basque Government, the Provincial Council of Bizkaia, the provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, the Provincial Council of Araba, the Bilbao City Council, the Donostia City Council, the Gasteiz City Council, and Euskal Fondoa, the Association of Basque Local Cooperating Entities. The collected data encompasses all funding awarded since 2016, meaning that some funding may have been committed before but was fully disbursed in that year. Therefore, some projects may have been started before 2016.

The data analysis was carried out using spreadsheets, in which the following relevant information was differentiated: (1) data from all Basque administrations for all available years; (2) data from all Gipuzkoa administrations, including the Donostia City Council, the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, and Gipuzkoa municipalities that had participated in any cooperation project through Euskal Fondoa; (3) funds received by Gipuzkoa NGDOs, not limited to funds received from Gipuzkoa administrations but also including other public administrations from which they had received funding; and (4) data from the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, the main funding institution in the territory.

Once this information was differentiated, the analysis was conducted according to the allocation of projects based on the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) [2] code. First, DAC code 410 (General Environmental Protection) was considered, as it is the primary code in the field of environmental sustainability. Next, DAC codes were considered whose activities *a priori* (agriculture, energy, etc.,) could be directly related to environmental sustainability (DAC codes 140, 230, 311, 312, 313, 322, 520). However, it should be noted that *unsustainable* actions can also fall under these DAC codes, although it is assumed that this should not be the spirit of cooperation projects. Subsequently, DAC codes 151 and 998 were added to the list, as it was

2 DAC refers to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD, which is the main international forum for countries providing development cooperation. The DAC's primary goal is to promote development cooperation and policies at the international level (OECD, 2016). DAC sectors are the main areas of focus for development aid and are used to indicate the primary sector targeted by a project.

likely that projects assigned to these codes also had an impact on environmental sustainability (Table 1).

Project applicants specify the DAC code for their project, with it being most common for each project to be assigned only a single DAC code that generally corresponds to its primary area of focus. However, it is also possible that actions related to environmental sustainability could fall under a DAC code that is not specifically assigned as having an environmental perspective.

Table 1. Description of DAC codes for cooperation projects

DAC code	Description	Perspective
140	Water supply and sanitation	Environmental
151	Government and civil society, general	General
230	Energy generation, distribution and efficiency	Environmental
311	Agriculture	Environmental
312	Forestry	Environmental
313	Fishing	Environmental
322	Extractive industries	Environmental
410	General environmental protection	Environmental
520	Food aid development / Aid for food security	Environmental
998	Unallocated / Unspecified	General

Source: compiled by the authors.

Cooperation projects submitted to DFG calls for proposals

The source of information was the projects themselves submitted for public funding calls by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (DFG). Access was obtained to the evaluation templates of the projects submitted to the calls, which were provided by HEGOA. The information collected was anonymous, and its use was solely for the purposes of this research.

All projects with an environmental perspective that participated in the calls annually from 2016 to 2023 were analysed, regardless of whether they received funding or not. To analyse the environmental perspective, projects were differentiated into

Development Cooperation projects and Education projects for Social Transformation (EpTS), with a separate analysis matrix created for each type of project. The items considered for this analysis are detailed in Tables 2 and 3.

Based on the information contained in the matrices, and using spreadsheets, a descriptive quantitative analysis of the collected data was conducted.

Table 2. Description of the items in the analysis matrix of the Cooperation projects in Gipuzkoa

Item	Description
Year	Year of participation in the funding competition.
Name	Name of the project in the evaluation.
Decision	Whether funding was granted or not.
Score	Score of the criterion in the sustainability approach, with 5 being a partial score and 10 being a full score.
Environmental focus	How the environmental sustainability perspective is incorporated into the project, differentiating: • Transversal approach; when it has a score of 10 in the previous section and is not the main objective of the project. This means that environmental sustainability is integrated transversally into the project so that it is reflected in all actions and/or results. • Main objective; when it has a score of 10 in the previous section and is the main objective of the project. • Highlighted component; when the score in the previous section is 5, which means that the environmental aspect is only included in one action and one result.
Country	Country in which the project is carried out.
Classification	The DAC code and the *Creditor Reporting System* (CRS) sector of the projects are included.

Item	Description
Environmental Sector	The sector in which the project is carried out: • Agroecology • Agriculture • Environmental rights • Territory and nature • Environmentally sustainable enterprises • Community environmental management • Food sovereignty • Use of resources • Water • Energy • Transport • Waste
Context or problem	The problem that the project aims to address: • Lack of infrastructure • Lack of energy • Lack of guarantee of the right to food sovereignty • Violation of environmental rights or effects of climate change • Destruction of farmland or lack of support for farmers • Lack of access to water • Lack of hygiene or sanitation • Unsustainable ventures • Lack of defence of the territory
Actions	The actions carried out in the projects are classified as follows: • Training • Strengthening of organisations • Political participation or influence • Support for sustainable ventures • Creation of infrastructure • Resistance and resilience • Awareness and communication • Assistance

Item	Description
Results	The areas in which we hope to have an impact are: • Capacity building • Sustainable initiatives • Agroecology • Access to water • Food sovereignty • Environmental protection • Defence of the territory • Healthy environment • Energy efficiency • Access to resources • Sustainable use of natural resources • Waste
Nature of the local entity	• General entities • Entities with an environmental focus • None, when the entity had another type of nature
Target group	Projects may be directed at any vulnerable group in society: • Children • Women • Disabled people • Indigenous communities • Refugees and/or victims of conflict
Local agent	It is noted if a local agent with an environmental focus is identified in the summary of the analysed project.

Source: compiled by the authors.

Table 3. Description of items in the analysis matrix of the Education projects for Social Transformation in Gipuzkoa

Item	Description
Year	Year of participation in the funding competition
Name	Name of the project in the evaluation
Decision	Funding was granted or not

Item	Description
Score	Score achieved by the project in the environmental sustainability criterion, with 5 being the partial score and 10 the total score.
Focus	How the environmental sustainability perspective is incorporated into the project, distinguishing: • Transversal approach; when it has a score of 10 in the previous section and it is not the main objective of the project. This means that environmental sustainability is integrated transversally into the project so that it is reflected in all actions and/or results. • Main objective; when it has a score of 10 in the previous section and it is the main objective of the project. • Highlighted component; when the score in the previous section is 5, which means that the environmental aspect is included in only one action and one result.
Geographic focus	The problems addressed by the project: the Global South or the Global North.
Classification	The DAC code and the *Creditor Reporting System* (CRS) sector of the projects are recorded.
Context or problem	The problems addressed by the project. Environmental problems identified: • Crisis of the environmental system • Irresponsible consumption • Unsustainable lives • Energy And social problems; • Globalisation • Deterioration of human life • Discrimination of peasants or indigenous communities • Discrimination (race, gender, …) • Peace processes or armed conflicts • Security of defenders of the territory • Effects of multinationals and megaprojects • Gender violence

Item	Description
Actions	The actions carried out in the projects: • Awareness or sensitisation • Communication • Education or research • Promotion
Result	The area in which we want to influence: • Environmental sustainability and environmental protection • Sustainable consumption and sustainable lifestyle habits • Socio-environmental entrepreneurship • Social transformation • Sustainable lives • Sustainable development • Defenders of the territory and human rights

Source: compiled by the authors.

Surveys of NGDOs from Gipuzkoa

The quantitative analysis was completed with information from a survey aimed at NGDOs in Gipuzkoa. Based on the diagnosis made so far, it was assumed that environmental sustainability was not sufficiently integrated into the activity of these organisations. Thus, in addition to a series of initial control questions, the survey included three blocks of questions (Table 4): (i) about the external elements that limit the incorporation of environmental sustainability, (ii) about the internal elements, and (iii) the potential for incorporating the environmental sustainability perspective. Its design and writing was carried out in accordance with the main methodological indications of this task, such as compartmentalisation of the questionnaire, type of writing, etc. (Arundel, 2023). Also, a first version of the questionnaire was tested with a selected group of NGDOs surveyed, as a previous step to preparing the final version.

Table 4. List of elements analysed in the survey divided into three blocks	
External elements	Awareness
	Project framework
	Provincial Council
	Reference paradigms
Internal elements	Project approaches
	Project content
	Reasons for incorporation
	Application paradigm
	Training and knowledge
Pontentialities	Process of mainstreaming the approach
	Necessary changes
	NGDO needs
	Energy and material sources
	Policy coherence

Source: compiled by the authors.

Interviews with cooperation agents from Gipuzkoa

In addition to the surveys, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with the aim of gaining first-hand insight into the perceptions and experiences of key cooperation agents in Gipuzkoa. The interviews were designed by combining different types of questions according to a coherent sequence (Liamputtong, 2009). During the process, active listening was employed to ensure that the interviewees could express themselves autonomously and freely. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

There were two types of interviews, depending on the type of agent being interviewed, and both followed the logic of the survey in terms of the topics covered (Table 5). The first type of interview was aimed at representative NGDOs, while the second was directed at the main public administrations involved in cooperation in Gipuzkoa.

Table 5. List of elements analysed in the interview divided into three blocks		
	NGDOs	**Administration**
External elements	Presence	Other administrations
	Reference paradigm	Presence of the project approach
	Dimensions of sustainability	
	North-South priorities	North-South differences
	Required project content	Administration management
Internal elements	Own paradigm	Reference paradigm
	Project content	Project evaluation
	Score importance	Difference between Cooperation projects and EpTS
	Project results	
	Training and knowledge	Financing
Potentialities	Administration - Provincial Council	Energy and material resources
	North-South strategy or global strategy	Training and knowledge-sharing platforms
	Impacts of the environmental crisis	Policy coherence
	Energy and material resources	Future

Source: compiled by the authors.

The first type of interview was conducted with six NGDOs, involving a total of eight interviewees. In line with the objective pursued and the characteristics of the sample population, the selection of NGDOs to be interviewed was based on the criteria of "degree of environmental integration" and "size of the organisation." Thus, the NGDOs interviewed exhibited the following characteristics:

- An environmental organisation involved in cooperation projects.
- A small NGDO with a track record in implementing cooperation projects with an environmental sustainability perspective (where two people participated in the interview).
- A small NGDO with no track record in projects with an environmental sustainability perspective.
- A large NGDO with no track record in projects with an environmental perspective.

- Two large NGDOs with a track record in projects with an environmental perspective (in one of them two people participated in the interview).

Table 6. Table of interviews carried out with NGDOs

Interviews	Criteria		Number of persons interviewed	Date and place of interview	Duration
	Organisation size	Environmental trajectory of the organisation			
1 Interview	Small	No	1	Donostia, 15/11/2023	36 min.
2 Interview	Small	Yes	2	Donostia, 15/11/2023	1hr and 17 min.
3 Interview	Large	No	1	Donostia, 20/11/2023	1hr
4 Interview	Large	Yes	1	Sestao, 16/11/2023	1hr and 15 min.
5 Interview	Large	Yes	2	Bilbao, 22/11/2023	1hr and 11 min.
6 Interview	Ecologist		1	Bilbao, 22/11/2023	1hr and 5 min.

Source: compiled by the authors.

The second type of interview was conducted with the main public administrations that fund projects in Gipuzkoa: the City Council of Donostia, the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, and eLankidetza - the Basque Agency for Development Cooperation. Regarding the City Council of Donostia, only one representative was interviewed, while in the other two institutions, more individuals were interviewed: at the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, two people were interviewed, with complementary profiles (one political and one technical); at the Agency, four people with technical profiles were interviewed, providing an in-depth understanding of the situation of Basque cooperation.

Table 7. Table of interviews carried out with public administrations					
Interviews	**Criteria**	**Organisation**	**Number of personas interviewed**	**Date and place of interview**	**Duration**
1 Interview	Provincial Administration	Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa	2	Donostia, 29/11/2023	1hr
2 Interview	Municipal Administration	Donostia City Council	1	Donostia, 29/11/2023	1hr
3 Interview	Autonomous Administration	eLankidetza	4	Vitoria-Gasteiz, 14/12/2023	1hr and 16 min.

Source: compiled by the authors.

It should be noted that anonymity was maintained for responses to both the questionnaires and interviews, and the information used exclusively for research purposes, such as the preparation of this report. For methodological reasons, the interviews were recorded, with the consent of the interviewees.

3. Analysis

This section presents the results of the analyses conducted in three distinct sections. First, it addresses the document analysis based on the regulatory framework and planning instruments for cooperation policy, both within the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV) and the Historical Territory of Gipuzkoa (THG). Second, it presents a descriptive analysis of the public funds from the CAPV allocated to cooperation during the 2016-2022 period. Finally, it details the analysis of the cooperation projects funded by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (DFG) between 2016 and 2023.

3.1. Regulatory and planning framework for cooperation policy

3.1.1.Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV)

This section analyses the content of the laws and plans related to cooperation in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV) from the perspective of environmental sustainability. We begin by examining Law 1/2007, which has been in force for the past 15 years. Next, we summarise the key points of the Report on the Basque Development Cooperation Law, prepared by UPV/EHU professor Koldo Unceta. Lastly, we review the most important aspects of the Draft Law on Basque Cooperation and Solidarity, and the law itself, which was finally enacted. Subsequently, the main environmental aspects of the IV Development Cooperation Master Plan 2018-2021 are higlighted. The section ends with an analysis of the Master Plan of the Basque NGDO Coordinator, the principal joint document of organisations in the sector.

Over the last 15 years, Basque cooperation has been governed by **Law 1/2007, of February 22, on Development Cooperation**. Although the law provided an excellent diagnosis of the state of cooperation at the time, it was limited by its somewhat outdated view of cooperation. Among the issues highlighted by the law was the need to protect the environment, which was a novel concept in the field of cooperation, but it did not specify how the environment should be protected or how to ensure responsible use of natural resources. The law contains some signs of environmental sustainability mainstreaming, as certain non-environmental principles include elements of this perspective. However, this can be considered marginal since environmental sustainability is not one of the law's priority approaches. The law frames cooperation within the paradigm of sustainable human development, where the environmental dimension is one of its pillars, although it is seen as equally important as the economic and social dimensions. Thus, despite beginning to address environmental issues, this law cannot be considered a benchmark for environmental sustainability in the field of cooperation.

The **Report on the Basque cooperation law for development** criticises the law itself for not aligning with an updated vision of international cooperation. Although it acknowledges that the world faces complex, diverse, and interdependent challenges, this is not reflected in the law. The report suggests that this is due to a more traditional approach to cooperation, which fails to address today's challenges. Therefore, the report calls for a new legal framework that considers the current situation (challenges, global issues, systemic interdependence) and regulates cooperation with a focus on global justice and sustainability.

In this context, the **Draft Law on Basque Cooperation and Solidarity** reflects a shift towards a new paradigm of cooperation. This document is based on an assessment that recognises we are in a state of systemic crisis, where environmental concerns must be prioritised. It calls for a transition from the current capitalist system to an economic model that is more socially and environmentally responsible. Thus, the primary goal of international cooperation should be global justice, while also aiming for the sustainability of life, meaning a system that prioritises environmental and social factors over economic ones. The inclusion of sustainability among the guiding principles of the law is a significant step forward, as is its integration across the other principles. This draft law notably emphasises environmental sustainability.

In fact, the recently approved Cooperation Law, **Law 3/2024 of February 15, on Cooperation and Solidarity**, represents a step forward in incorporating the discourse of environmental sustainability into Basque cooperation. In its preamble, the law references a deeply unequal, complex world characterised by interdependent global processes and an unsustainable hegemonic development model that threatens both human life and the planet. It concludes that it is therefore essential to generate economic, cultural and social alternatives that prioritise the sustainability of human lives and other beings on the planet.

In its provisions, the law's objectives (Article 4) aim to promote, on the one hand, human development and sustainability and, on the other, to combat inequality and advance global justice, including its environmental dimension. Additionally, two of its key approaches (Article 6) are worth noting. One is the eco-social approach, which recognises the planet's biophysical limits and the interdependence between social and environmental imbalances. This approach highlights the collapse of ecosystems caused by continuous economic growth and advocates for progress towards an eco-social transition that does not compromise life sustainability. It also promotes actions in areas such as energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, biodiversity protection, and sustainable land management. The other is the policy coherence for sustainable development approach, which emphasises the need

for an integrated perspective in public policies to harness synergies and reduce conflicts and inconsistencies in public actions. Explicitly mentioned, this approach involves integrating the perspective of human development and environmental sustainability into the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies by each public administration (Article 10). These priority approaches are complemented by the human rights, feminist, local-global, and territorial approaches, with the latter also closely linked to environmental sustainability aspects.

The discourse of this law is considerably more ambitious in terms of environmental sustainability compared to its predecessor. It incorporates elements from theories such as ecofeminism, eco-social transitions, and environmental justice. Consequently, its interpretative framework goes beyond the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are key references for the international development and cooperation agenda.

The CAPV complements its legal and planning framework in this area with the **IV Master Plan for Development Cooperation (2018-2021)**, which remains in effect in 2024. This plan is conceptually based on Agenda 2030, where sustainable development is interpreted through economic, social, and environmental dimensions, all given equal importance. This interpretation is based on the principle of "weak sustainability," which allows for trade-offs or substitution between dimensions. Although rooted in Agenda 2030, the plan critiques certain aspects of the agenda itself, such as its internal inconsistencies. This plan, a continuation of the previous one, still does not place significant emphasis on environmental sustainability. While it aims to address global challenges, including the ecological crisis as a priority issue, the environmental approach is not transversal but rather complementary to the other approaches. This is reflected in the fact that sustainable human development and ecological sustainability are considered marginal objectives. Environmental sustainability is not a central pillar of action (although it is included in the policy coherence approach), which again suggests it lacks prominence. Furthermore, environmental sustainability is not explicitly mentioned in the budget, potentially indicating a lack of strong commitment. However, it is worth noting that within the AUZO(LAN)KIDE initiatives, there are some which focus on environmental sustainability, such as the solidarity-based economic model, responsible public procurement, the inter-institutional water programme, technology, and the environment.

Lastly, in the **Master Plan of the Basque Country NGDO Coordinator**, we find a stronger emphasis on environmental sustainability. This document outlines the future challenges facing the coordinator in the cooperation sector. Across its transversal

pillars, there are references to the planet and life, not only in the axis concerning the Rights of Nature but also in other areas like social transformation and the glocal approach. In fact, it promotes a discourse centred on the Rights of Nature—a novel concept that marks a step forward in this regard. This paradigm advocates for a more horizontal relationship with nature and includes other worldviews beyond the Western perspective. Although this represents a significant conceptual advancement, this perspective is not clearly reflected in the strategies, as it is approached more from the lens of environmental sustainability than from the Rights of Nature.

3.1.2. Historical Territory of Gipuzkoa

Along with the regulations applicable to the entire territory of the CAPV, there are also a series of laws and planning instruments specifically applicable to Gipuzkoa. We begin by analysing the Strategic Framework for Development Cooperation of DFG, followed by the **Master Plan for Development Cooperation** of the DFG 2021-2030, and lastly the general and specific regulatory bases for awarding grants for development cooperation.

The objective of the **Strategic Framework for Development Cooperation of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council** for the period 2015-2019 is to strengthen cooperation based on the principles of solidarity and responsibility. This strategic framework sets the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a reference, from which work is carried out across different thematic areas to seek synergies that help increase the impact of cooperation. Its interpretation of sustainable development is based on three main pillars: economic, social and environmental. By aligning with the SDGs, the environmental perspective takes on some prominence, although it is approached from the concept of weak sustainability. It also emphasises that in order to achieve sustainable development, it is necessary to change the current production and consumption model to one that guarantees respect for human rights. All of this requires a shift in cooperation strategies through an integrated and comprehensive understanding of current challenges.

According to this strategic framework, the indicated changes need to occur at all institutional levels in order to promote real shifts in the consumption and production model, ensuring these changes happen coherently. This coherence also requires an integrated approach focused on education, which is seen as the cornerstone of cooperation and the path to creating a stronger commitment to it. The document outlines four types of projects, although none of them are exclusively dedicated to environmental sustainability. To achieve these changes, the framework presents a set

of guidelines to aid better design of cooperation projects, taking into account the resources available in Gipuzkoa.

The **Master Plan for Development Cooperation of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council** (2021-2030), to some extent, addresses some of the gaps in the strategic framework. This plan introduces a series of innovations, notably the multidimensional approach to cooperation. The plan continues to use Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as its main reference, which also aligns it with the principle of weak sustainability. However, as a multidimensional concept, it explicitly recognises the need for structural changes to achieve true global development, given that previous cooperation efforts had been limited to certain areas where progress was seen as easily reversible.

To advance in this direction, the plan outlines four key elements: (1) Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, (2) a global citizenship approach, (3) policy coherence for development, and (4) a territorial framework. In all of these, the presence of environmental sustainability is either minimal or aligned with weak sustainability. The plan also establishes seven guiding principles: long-term vision, partnership, gender equity, participation, the environment, evaluation, and transparency. The environmental principle is defined by Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement, where the primary risk is climate change rather than systemic crisis, although the latter is given some attention in the plan. Among the strategic objectives is a focus on the social and solidarity economy, which refers to the well-being of people through the responsible use of natural resources and a shift in the production and consumption model, emphasising both individual consumer responsibility and collective responsibility toward the current system.

In conclusion, the plan introduces interesting innovations compared to the strategic framework, but it still has certain weaknesses in terms of environmental sustainability, mainly due to its alignment with the weak sustainability principle. Additionally, the plan does not fully integrate the environmental approach, despite recognising its importance.

The strategic framework and the Master Plan establish the objectives to be achieved in the field of cooperation. However, in Gipuzkoa, decentralised cooperation is primarily carried out through projects undertaken by NGDOs. To facilitate this, the DFG annually allocates budgetary funds for cooperation projects through public calls for proposals. Each year, the **General and Specific regulatory bases for granting development cooperation subsidies** are published. An analysis of these bases, focusing on the inclusion of environmental sustainability from 2016 to 2023,

reveals that, despite gaining importance during this period, its presence remains quite marginal.

The regulatory bases have undergone changes since 2016, leading to the explicit inclusion of environmental sustainability. From 2016 onwards, the environmental criterion seemingly became a *sine qua non* condition for obtaining funding. However, in practice, it is not an exclusive criterion, as the adoption of an environmental perspective is used *de facto* to award higher scores during the project evaluation rather than as a reason for exclusion. In reality, projects are only excluded for administrative reasons.

Another noteworthy aspect is that none of the project groups included in the regulatory bases has environmental sustainability as a specific objective. Additionally, in the group of emergency aid and humanitarian action projects, there is no reference to the environmental crisis, meaning that environmental sustainability is excluded from these types of projects.

In 2020, there was a change in the evaluation criteria for projects submitted for funding. Previously, points were awarded to projects that included any kind of environmental action. However, from 2020, points are only given if the environmental perspective plays a prominent role, which *a priori* raises the bar, as not just any action is scored, but a meaningful result in terms of environmental sustainability must be achieved. Furthermore, projects are no longer awarded points for having *zero environmental impact* in the region, a criterion that was in place until 2020.

In projects for Education for Social Transformation (EpTS), the environmental criterion holds more importance than in those categorised as Cooperation projects, but it still does not carry as much weight as one might expect. In fact, the significance of certain criteria, such as women's rights and human rights, is greater in EpTS projects than that of environmental sustainability, placing the latter in a secondary position. Additionally, it is important to note that the grant call bases do not specify criteria for assessing environmental sustainability, making it difficult to evaluate the application of this criterion in each project and, consequently, to determine objectively whether the actions are truly sustainable or not.

3.2. Public funds allocated to cooperation

In this section, public funds allocated to cooperation by various administrations in the CAPV are analysed, using information available on the Basque Public

Cooperation Portal. The analysis is divided into four parts: (1) funds allocated by public administrations of the CAPV; (2) funds allocated by public administrations of Gipuzkoa; (3) Funds allocated by public administrations of the CAPV to NGDOs in Gipuzkoa; (4) funds allocated by DFG.

3.2.1. Funds allocated by the public administrations of the CAPV

From 2016 to 2022, public administrations in the CAPV allocated over 700 million euros for development projects (Table 8), averaging approximately 100 million euros per year. Projects with an environmental perspective accounted for 15.6% of the total funds awarded, and specifically, projects with the specific DAC code for Environmental Protection (DAC 410) represented only about 1%. This demonstrates the limited quantitative importance of environmental sustainability in development projects receiving funding from Basque administrations.

In addition, it is important to analyse the situation of projects with DAC codes 151 and 998, since there are also environmentally-focused projects under these codes, as will be discussed later. In this case, funds allocated to DAC code 151 (Government and Civil Society) make up 41%, while funds for DAC code 998 (Unallocated or Unspecified) account for 12% (Figure 1). Projects under these two DAC codes capture over 50% of the total funds and are sectors that do not prioritise environmental sustainability. Therefore, environmental sustainability is not a priority for development projects funded by the Basque administrations as a whole.

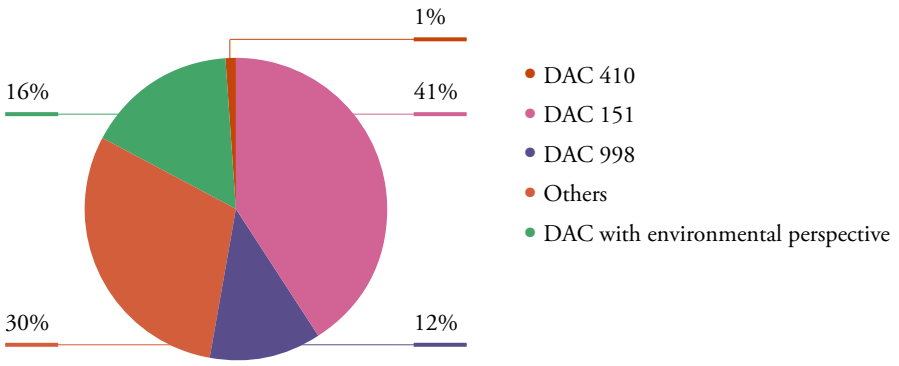
Regarding the funds allocated to DAC codes considered to have an environmental perspective, the majority are directed towards Agriculture (DAC 311), followed by Water Supply and Sanitation (DAC 140). The former accounts for 56%, and the latter for 35%, meaning that projects under these two DAC codes alone represent over 90% of the total funds with an environmental perspective (Figure 2). Therefore, the environmental issues addressed are limited to these areas, and it is important to note that projects under DAC codes 151 and 998 do not necessarily align with environmental sustainability.

Table 8. Distribution by DAC code of the funds granted by all public administrations of the CAPV, years 2016-2022

DAC	DAC description	Amount	Percentage
140	Water supply and sanitation	38,906,396 €	5.5%
230	Energy generation, distribution and efficiency	0 €	0%
311	Agriculture	62,062,899 €	8.8%
312	Forestry	1,715,178 €	0.2%
313	Fisheries	3,007,828 €	0.4%
322	Extractive industries	0 €	0%
520	Food aid for development / Aid for food security	4,751,621 €	0.7%
	Total DAC with environmental perspective	**110,443,922 €**	**15.6%**
410	General environmental protection	7,815,685 €	1.1%
151	Government and Civil Society, general	285,167,826 €	40.6%
998	Unallocated / Unspecified	86,491,028 €	12.3%
	Remainder of DAC	214,178,774 €	30.4%
	Total	**704,097,235 €**	**100.0%**

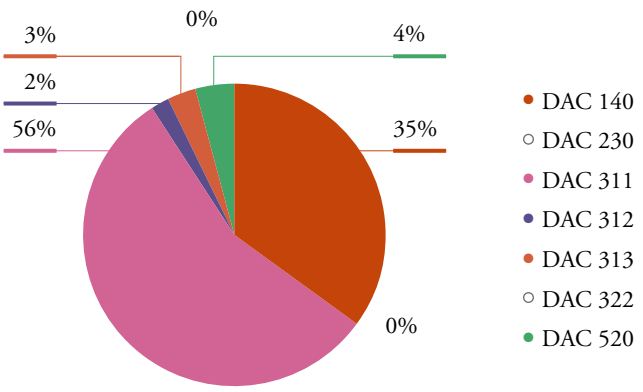
Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

Figure 1. Total funds granted by public administrations of the Basque Country, distributed according to DAC code, 2016-2022



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

Figure 2. Total funds granted by all public administrations of the CAPV to projects with a DAC code with an environmental perspective, distributed according to DAC code, 2016-2022.



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

3.2.2. Funds allocated by the public administrations of Gipuzkoa

The public administrations of Gipuzkoa (DFG, the Donostia City Council, and the municipalities of Gipuzkoa participating through Euskal Fondoa) funded development cooperation projects with nearly 65 million euros during the same period (2016-2022), averaging 9.2 million euros per year (Table 2). Compared to the total amount awarded by all CAPV administrations, the situation is similar, although the environmental perspective in Gipuzkoa holds even less significance. This is especially true for DAC code 410, which relates to environmental protection. The administrations of Gipuzkoa have allocated only 0.2% of their total funding to this DAC code, a figure significantly lower than the 1.1% for the entire CAPV. The aggregate of projects with environmentally focused DAC codes is also lower in Gipuzkoa, representing around 10%, compared to 15.6% for the entire CAPV. Therefore, in this regard, the environmental perspective holds relatively less importance in Gipuzkoa than in the CAPV overall.

Projects categorised under DAC code 998, "Unallocated or Unspecified," account for 21%, nearly double the proportion found in the broader context of the CAPV. However, projects under DAC code 151, "Government and Civil Society," remain around 40% (Figure 3). It is important to note that both of these DAC codes may include projects with an environmental focus, which would increase the relevance

of environmental sustainability, although this cannot be confirmed due to a lack of more detailed information. In any case, these data show that environmental sustainability or the inclusion of environmental goals are not priorities among the projects receiving funds from the Gipuzkoa administrations.

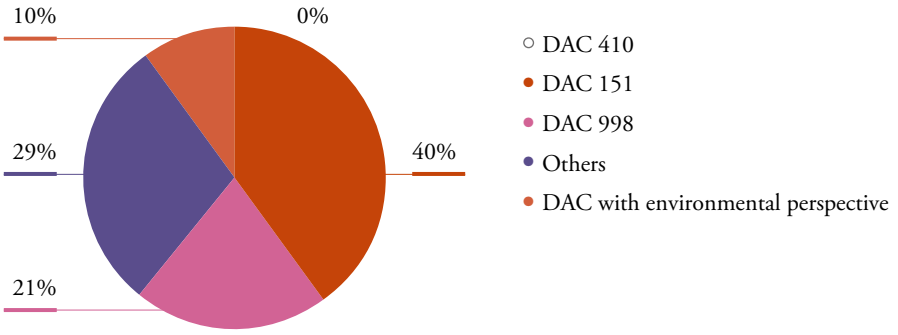
When analysing the funds allocated to DAC codes with an environmental perspective, we observe a similar situation to that of the CAPV. In this case, the funds are primarily concentrated in two DAC codes: DAC 311, Agriculture, and DAC 140, Water Supply and Sanitation. The former accounts for 68%, and the latter for 22%, once again reflecting that projects under only these two codes receive just over 90% of the funds allocated to DAC codes with an environmental focus (Figure 4). Additionally, the remaining funds are distributed between two other DAC codes: 313, Fisheries, and 520, Food Security. Overall, it is clear that environmental issues are linked to a very limited range of areas and do not extend to other sectors.

Table 9. Distribution by DAC codes of the funds granted by the public administrations of Gipuzkoa, years 2016-2022

DAC	DAC description	Amount	Percentage
140	Water supply and sanitation	4,428,684 €	6.9%
230	Energy generation, distribution and efficiency	0 €	0.0%
311	Agriculture	1,428,684 €	2.2%
312	Forestry	0 €	0.0%
313	Fisheries	95,000 €	0.1%
322	Extractive industries	0 €	0.0%
520	Food aid for development / Aid for food security	538,228 €	0.8%
	Total DAC with environmental perspective	**6,490,596 €**	**10.2%**
410	General environmental protection	127,975 €	0.2%
151	Government and Civil Society, general	26,184,765 €	40.3%
998	Unallocated / Unspecified	13,366,815 €	20.5%
	Remainder of DAC	18,719,311 €	28.9%
	Total	**64,889,462 €**	**100.0%**

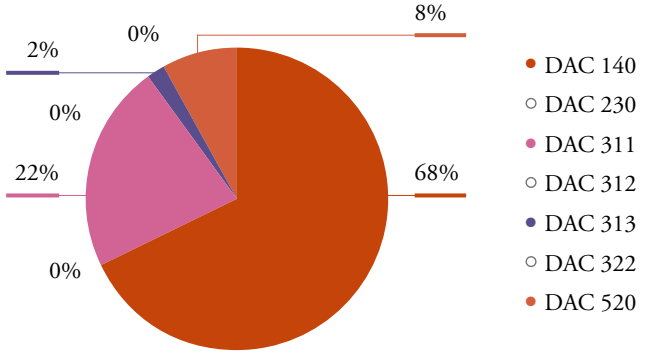
Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

Figure 3. Total funds granted by the public administrations of Gipuzkoa, distributed according to DAC code, 2016-2022.



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

Figure 4. Total funds granted by public administrations of Gipuzkoa to projects with a DAC code with an environmental perspective, distributed according to DAC code, 2016-2022



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

3.2.3. Funds allocated by the public administrations of the CAPV to NGDOs in Gipuzkoa

The NGDOs of Gipuzkoa received 124 million euros from all public administrations of the CAPV during the period 2016-2022 (Table 10), with an annual average of approximately 17.7 million euros. This amount exceeds that granted by the

administrations of Gipuzkoa, indicating, among other things, that NGDOs in this region also seek funding from other administrations to carry out their projects.

The funds received for projects with a DAC code related to environmental sustainability represent almost 13% of the total, while those under DAC codes 151 and 998 account for 55% and 13%, respectively (Figure 5). Therefore, the implementation of projects with an environmental sustainability perspective by the NGDOs of Gipuzkoa has been rather limited. Specifically, projects under the general environmental protection code (DAC 410) only account for 1% of the total funds, reinforcing this observation.

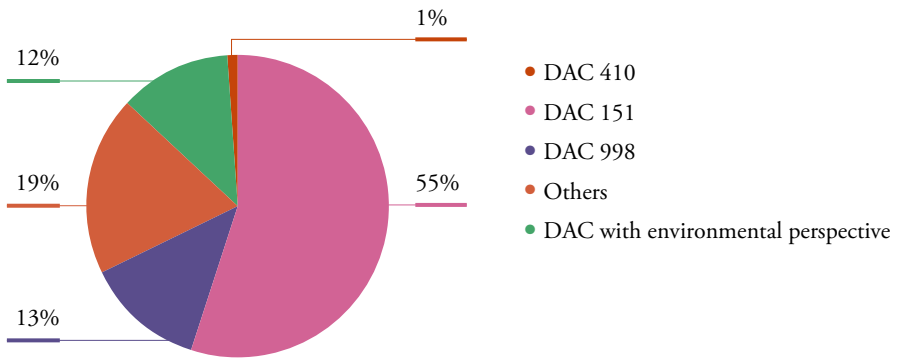
Regarding the projects with DAC codes related to environmental sustainability, Agriculture (DAC 311) holds the greatest relative weight, followed by some distance by Water Supply and Sanitation (DAC 140) (Figure 6). Additionally, there are only two other DAC codes that have received funding: 313 (Fisheries) and 520 (Food Security). Once again, we see that environmental issues are not a priority, and environmental sustainability is limited to only a few sectors.

Table 10. Distribution according to DAC code of the funds granted by the public administrations of the CAPV to NGDOs in Gipuzkoa, years 2016-2022

DAC	DAC description	Amount	Percentage
140	Water supply and sanitation	3,424,763€	2.8%
230	Energy generation, distribution and efficiency	0€	0.0%
311	Agriculture	10,879,439€	8.7%
312	Forestry	0€	0.0%
313	Fisheries	95,000€	0.1%
322	Extractive industries	0€	0.0%
520	Food aid for development / Aid for food security	390,356€	0.3%
	Total DAC with environmental perspective	**14,789,558€**	**12.9%**
410	General environmental protection	1,209,064€	1.0%
151	Government and Civil Society, general	68,253,747€	54.8%
998	Unallocated / Unspecified	16,297,522€	13.1%
	Remainder of DAC	23,929,288€	19.2%
	Total	**124,479,179€**	**100.0%**

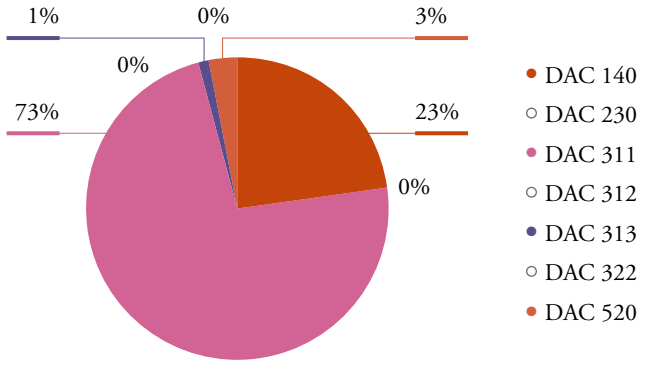
Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

Figure 5. Total funds granted by public administrations of the CAPV to NGDOs in Gipuzkoa, distributed according to DAC code, 2016-2022



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

Figure 6. Total funds granted by public administrations of the CAPV to projects by NGDOs in Gipuzkoa and with a DAC code with an environmental perspective, distributed according to DAC code, 2016-2022



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

3.2.4. Funds allocated by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa

The DFG allocated 41 million euros to cooperation projects between 2016 and 2022 (Table 11), averaging around 6 million euros per year. This means that approximately 65% of the funds for cooperation granted by administrations of Gipuzkoa came from the DFG. In this case, projects with an environmental focus accounted for only 5% of the total funds, and those aimed at General Environmental Protection

(DAC 410) were almost nonexistent, representing just 0.2%. These figures show that, among all the administrations, the DFG is the one whose funding allocated to environmental issues holds the least relative importance. Projects under DAC codes 151 and 998 have a greater weight than those with environmental DAC codes; DAC 151 accounts for 44%, and DAC 998 for 22% of the total funds, making them the codes with the highest relative weight (Figure 7). It has been noted that these two DAC codes may include projects with an environmental focus, but there is no available information to confirm this. In any case, it is clear that environmental sustainability is not a priority in the cooperation projects funded by the DFG.

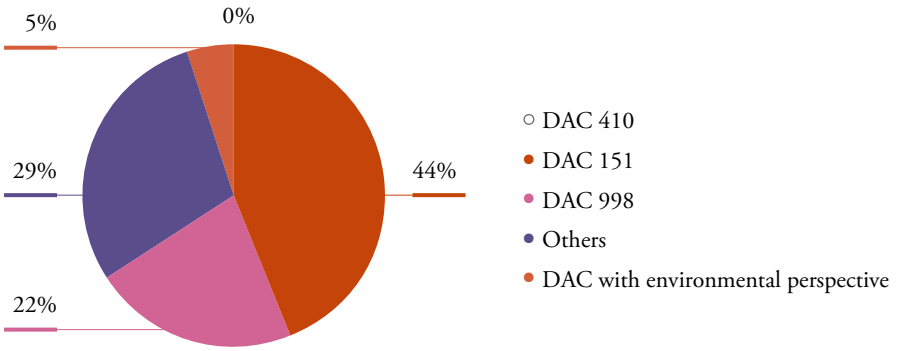
Moreover, in the case of environmental DAC codes, we again observe that the majority of the funds are directed primarily to one specific sector (Figure 8): DAC 140, Water Supply and Sanitation (53%), followed by DAC 311, Agriculture (33%). Along with these, the rest of the funds are limited to two other DAC codes: Fisheries (DAC 313) and Food Security (DAC 520).

Table 11. Distribution according to DAC code of the funds granted by the DFG, years 2016-2022

DAC	DAC description	Amount	Percentage
140	Water supply and sanitation	1,050,254 €	2.5%
230	Energy generation, distribution and efficiency	0 €	0.0%
311	Agriculture	654,661 €	1.6%
312	Forestry	0 €	0.0%
313	Fisheries	95,000 €	0.2%
322	Extractive industries	0 €	0.0%
520	Food aid for development / Aid for food security	178,000 €	0.3%
	Total DAC with environmental perspective	**1,977,915 €**	**4.9%**
410	General environmental protection	77,983 €	0.2%
151	Government and Civil Society, general	18,358,866 €	44.1%
998	Unallocated / Unspecified	9,268,459 €	22.3%
	Remainder of DAC	11,950,915 €	28.7%
	Total	**41,634,138 €**	**100.0%**

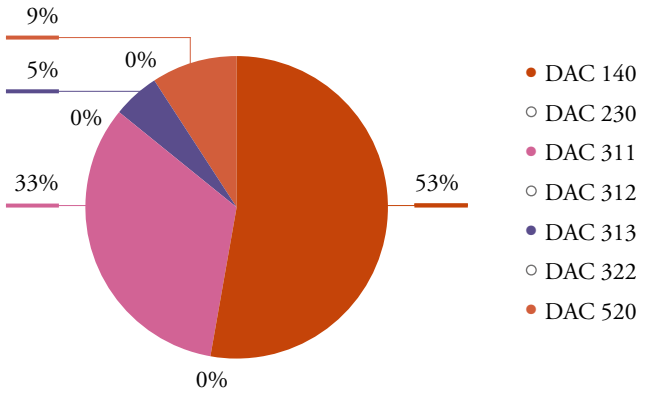
Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

Figure 7. Total funds granted by the DFG, distributed according to DAC code, 2016-2022



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

Figure 8. Total funds granted by the DFG to projects with a DAC code with an environmental perspective, distributed according to DAC code, 2016-2022



Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

3.3. Orientation and scope of cooperation projects

This section addresses the analysis of cooperation projects submitted to the DFG funding calls between 2016 and 2023. We begin by analysing International Cooperation projects (hereafter referred to as Cooperation projects), and then Education projects for Social Transformation projects (hereafter referred to as EpTS projects).

3.3.1. Cooperation projects

Analysis of the Cooperation projects follows the structure of the content matrix used for the evaluation (see Table 2): (1) score, (2) approach, (3) DAC sector, (4) environmental sector, (5) issues, (6) actions, (7) results, (8) profile of the local entity, and (9) target population.

1. Regarding the **scores** achieved by the Cooperation projects, the overall situation is analysed first, followed by an analysis in two time blocks: 2016-2019 and 2020-2023. This division is due to a change in the evaluation criteria for environmental sustainability in 2020. That year, it was established that not only would the presence of environmental sustainability in the planned project activities be assessed, but must also be treated as a prominent component.

   In the general analysis, the first striking observation is the low score for environmental sustainability, which remains around 2-3 points out of 10 in all the years. This indicates that, in most cases, environmental sustainability is not included in the projects. If we focus only on the scores of projects that do incorporate environmental sustainability, the scores average around 6.6 out of 10. Although this surpasses 5, it is still relatively low, suggesting that in most cases where environmental sustainability is included, it is addressed only partially. The highest score for environmental sustainability was achieved in 2019, marking a turning point where, after a rising trend up to that year, a decline began. This shift may be due to the change in the scoring criteria for environmental sustainability.

   Thus, a change in the relevance of environmental sustainability can be observed when analysed by blocks (2016-2019 and 2020-2023), as this approach has a greater presence in the second block than in the first. Between 2016 and 2019, around 44% of the projects included some environmental activity, whereas from 2020 to 2023, this figure increased to just under 52%, though this is influenced by the high score in 2021. In 2021, the environmental sustainability score was higher for approved projects than for all projects submitted for funding. This trend has continued since 2021, but previously the opposite occurred: the score for this criterion was higher in submitted projects than in those that were approved. This shift could be attributed to the 2020 change in the evaluation criteria. Until 2019, the inclusion of activities with an environmental focus was positively evaluated, while from 2020 onward, only when it was a prominent element was it considered. Therefore, it could be understood that the increased *environmental requirements* may influence whether or not a project is approved.

2. Regarding the **approach** of the projects, a distinction was made between whether the environmental sustainability focus is integrated transversally, constitutes the main objective, or is included in one of the project's objectives. It is generally observed that environmental sustainability is neither transversal nor the main objective in most projects; instead, the environmental focus is primarily included in one of the project's objectives (Table 12). Furthermore, when considering projects with an environmental focus in relation to the total number of projects, the impact is even lower, as these represent less than 48% of all submitted projects.

Table 12. Analysis of the environmental sustainability approach in the Cooperation projects submitted to the DFG calls for proposals in the years 2016-2023

	Environmental approach							
	Transversal		Main objective		Important component		Total	
Projects submitted with an environmental perspective								
Total projects submitted with an environmental perspective (number and %)	32	18.2%	28	15.6%	116	65.9%	176	100.0%
% projects with an environmental perspective out of the total projects submitted	8.9%		7.8%		32.1%		47.8%	
Projects awarded with an environmental perspective								
Total projects awarded with an environmental perspective (number and %)	21	20.2%	12	11.5%	75	72.1%	108	100.0%
% Total projects awarded with an environmental perspective out of the total projects	5.8%		3.3%		20.8%		29.9%	

Source: compiled by the authors based on data from the Basque Public Cooperation Portal.

During the 2016-2019 period, the environmental sustainability focus was primarily included in one of the project's objectives, as very few projects existed where this focus was transversal or where environmental sustainability was the main objective. For every project with a transversal focus or whose

main objective was sustainability, there were three projects with a notable environmental component. The 2020 change in scoring criteria did not alter this trend; there continued to be few projects with a transversal focus or main objective compared to those where environmental sustainability was limited to a single action and result. However, the ratio decreased by almost half, and for every project with a transversal focus or main objective, there were 1.69 projects with a notable environmental sustainability component. These trends also held true for the approved projects. Thus, it can be inferred that the scoring change likely led to a greater inclusion of sustainability in the project focus, although this cannot be categorically stated since no specific analysis has been conducted beyond these findings.

3. Regarding the analysis of **DAC sectors**, it is important to note that each project is assigned to only one DAC code. The vast majority of projects fall under DAC code 151 (Government and Civil Society), a category whose projects do not inherently have an environmental perspective. Therefore, it can be concluded that environmental sustainability is not a priority in cooperation projects. However, since each project is categorised under a single DAC code, this defines the project's primary focus, which means the project may still include environmental sustainability actions, even if they are not the main priority. When analysing projects within DAC sectors that could have a greater environmental sustainability perspective, as discussed in Section 3.2, most are seen to be classified under DAC code 311 (Agriculture), a code that does not necessarily require environmental sustainability actions. In conclusion, based on the DAC sectors of the projects, environmental sustainability is not a priority.

4. On the other hand, when analysing the **environmental sectors** addressed in the projects, in most cases, projects focus on a specific sector and do not aim to work simultaneously across multiple sectors. In instances where projects target more than one sector, these sectors are thematically linked, which, as expected, highlights the difficulty of working in seemingly unrelated areas.

   The sectors most commonly associated with environmental sustainability are the right to food, environmental education, territory defence, and water provision. This trend remains consistent throughout the analysed period. The right to food gathers the most projects, as many initiatives are related to food sovereignty, agroecology, and agriculture. There are also numerous projects focused on training and awareness, making environmental education the second most represented sector. This area aims to raise awareness about the importance of sustainability while also building capacities in various aspects of

environmental sustainability. Regarding territory defence, a significant number of projects focus on indigenous communities and victims of extractivism (generally promoted by multinational companies). Lastly, water provision is also important, with many projects involving the construction of infrastructure and water management. Given the close relationship between water resources, agriculture, and environmental health, this explains the relatively high number of projects in this sector.

5. The sectors addressed are directly related to the environmental sustainability **issues** previously identified. The most frequently identified problems include the lack of assurance of the right to food sovereignty, climate change, and land degradation. However, the most significant issue identified is the lack of territory defence, meaning that both the territory and the people dedicated to its protection are not being safeguarded.

   When analysing only the projects that have received funding, some differences emerge. On the one hand, the proportion of identified issues (right to food, environmental education, territory defence, and water provision) increases. Additionally, hygiene and sanitation problems grow in importance, becoming a priority alongside the previously mentioned issues.

   In contrast to these priority issues, there are some that are identified only in a few cases, such as those related to energy and the lack of sustainable enterprises. Addressing these issues should be directed toward the energy transition, which is highly relevant for environmental sustainability. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the absence of territory defence also leads to environmental impacts caused by large-scale projects, which are closely related to unsustainable enterprises.

6. The analysis of **actions** aligns with the observations made about the sectors, as they are generally interconnected. The predominant actions are those related to training and awareness-raising, as these are cross-cutting activities across all sectors of environmental sustainability. Secondly, there are many actions supporting infrastructure and enterprises, which are linked to the sectors of environmental security and water provision, both of which are prominent. Lastly, numerous actions focus on organisational strengthening and political advocacy, closely related to territory rights, another key sector.

7. In line with the above, the **outcomes** anticipated by the projects are also connected to their actions. The most pursued outcome is capacity building, meaning training, raising awareness, and strengthening organisations. The next

outcome is the strengthening of food sovereignty, sought after in many of the target communities, particularly in projects focused on agroecology, agriculture, and nutrition. Lastly, there are also outcomes related to the right to live in a healthy environment, with projects linked to water access, waste management, and recycling.

8. Regarding the type of **local entities** with which collaborations take place, the vast majority of organisations work on development in general, without any specific specialisation such as feminism or environmental sustainability. Additionally, within this latter group, there is a variety of entities of different natures, although most are organisations focused on the rights of farmers, rural development, or the defence of agricultural workers. Therefore, specific specialisation in favour of environmental sustainability is very limited among local entities.

9. Lastly, the profiles of the **target population** were studied to determine whether any of the projects are directed at profiles related to environmental sustainability. The analysis indicates that the target population in this case is the same as in most Cooperation projects, as they are generally aimed at addressing poverty and inequality. Therefore, the objective is to serve the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations in all cases.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that projects with an environmental sustainability perspective are not really that different from other projects. Environmental sustainability projects, in general, rely on a more traditional conception of cooperation, as they primarily aim to ensure social development and reduce poverty and inequalities. However, various actions are proposed to address issues related to environmental sustainability. On the one hand, there are projects that aim to improve access and quality to guarantee people's rights. On the other hand, there are political actions aimed at defending territories, which by their nature seek to strengthen people's capacities and enhance their influence in political processes that promote environmental protection.

3.3.2. Education Projects for Social Transformation

In the case of the **EpTS** projects, the structure of the content matrix used for the analysis is also followed (see Table 3): (1) score, (2) approach, (3) issues, (4) actions, and (5) results.

1. The most notable aspect of the **scores** achieved by the EpTS projects with an environmental perspective is the upward trend in the environmental sustainability

criterion, despite the fact that this score decreased in the last observed year (2023). The comparison between the years 2016-2019 and 2020-2023 shows a situation similar to that of the Cooperation projects; that is, after the change in the evaluation criteria regarding the environmental perspective, the presence of this type of project becomes more significant. In the first period, 48.5% of the projects included some type of activity or element of environmental sustainability, while in the second period this figure rises to 61%. However, the score of approved projects that include the environmental sustainability criterion is higher than the score of the total projects submitted, not just those approved, with the exceptions of the years 2017 and 2019, where the opposite occurs. Although the environmental sustainability perspective has always been prominent in EpTS projects, even more projects have incorporated this perspective following the change in evaluation criteria in 2020.

2. The analysis also indicates that the environmental sustainability **approach** in EpTS projects is not limited to including one particular activity but, rather, this approach is transversal or a priority objective in many cases. Thus, in this context, environmental sustainability is more significant than in Cooperation projects. In fact, there are more projects that include environmental sustainability as a primary objective or as a transversal element than projects where it is only part of an activity or objective. This circumstance is further enhanced by the change in the environmental evaluation criteria, as in the period 2016-2019, the ratio is 0.68 projects with a focus on some activity or objective for each project with a primary objective or transversal focus, while in the period 2020-2023, the ratio is 0.46. As observed, the change in evaluation criteria influences these projects, but to a lesser extent than in Cooperation projects.

   However, when analysed in relation to the overall situation of the submitted projects, the relative importance is not as pronounced; 51% of EpTS projects with an environmental perspective have been counted with respect to the total (Table 13). This means that environmental sustainability in EpTS projects remains relevant, but its relative importance decreases in global terms; 15% of the projects have this perspective as a transversal focus, 19% as a primary objective, and 17% as a important component.

Table 13. Analysis of the environmental sustainability approach in the EpTS projects submitted to the DFG calls in the years 2016-2023								
	Environmental approach							
	Transversal		Main objective		Important component		Total	
Projects submitted with an environmental perspective								
Total projects submitted with an environmental perspective (number and %)	29	28.4%	36	35.3%	32	31.4%	97	100.0%
% projects with an environmental perspective out of the total projects submitted	15.4%		19.2%		17%		51.6%	
Projects awarded with an environmental perspective								
Total projects awarded with an environmental perspective (number and %)	22	37.9%	22	37.9%	14	24.2%	58	100.0%
% Total projects awarded with an environmental perspective out of the total projects	11.7%		11.7%		7.5%		30.9%	

Source: compiled by the authors based on projects submitted to DFG calls.

3. Regarding the **issues**, social and environmental problems identified in the projects have been differentiated, with social problems seen to be more prominent than environmental ones. Thus, although EpTS projects have a greater focus on environmental sustainability than Cooperation projects, they also concentrate on reducing inequalities and combating poverty, even if it is from the perspective, and in favour, of sustainable models.

   The most prominent issue for EpTS projects is the global environmental crisis, closely followed by gender inequality and racial discrimination. Although the main issue among projects with an environmental sustainability perspective is environmental, many social problems are also identified concurrently. However, despite the wide variety of problems, the projects focus on only one or two; for this analysis, a long list of potential problems was created, where very few years showed more than 15% identification of issues.

   Beyond the importance of the global environmental crisis, a number of environmental problems are not addressed as much as one might initially think. For example, very few issues related to energy are identified, with only two projects among all those analysed considering it a problem. Additionally, irresponsible

consumption is not raised in as many projects as might be expected, despite many projects aiming to build alternatives to the current consumption system.

Consequently, it can be inferred that, in general, EpTS projects are not oriented from a technical analysis of environmental sustainability but, rather, mainly focus on the assumption that environmental sustainability is a variable that affects inequalities and poverty due to the consequences of the environmental crisis.

4. The actions carried out within the framework of EpTS projects are concentrated in the areas of awareness-raising/sensitisation (and consequently also communication) and education/research. This is consistent with the very nature of the projects, which are focused on the field of education, and with the fact that they are aimed at a broad audience. In contrast, actions aimed at creating alternative models from the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), responsible consumption, and similar initiatives are minor. Also, very few actions are directed at political advocacy, as these projects generally do not aim to persuade public administrations to change their behaviour. Furthermore, the types of actions carried out remain consistent year after year, as the NGDOs working on EpTS projects do not change and have strategies that are maintained over time. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that in very few projects is more than one action carried out, and when it does occur, it typically involves the same topic or actions of the same nature.

5. The analysis of the **results** indicates that they follow the trend of the actions, as in most projects only one or two results are sought. In cases where more results are identified, these are very closely related to each other. Most results focus on social transformation and promoting responsible consumption, although they are closely followed by results related to environmental sustainability and sustainable livelihoods. While the results related to promoting responsible consumption remain stable throughout the analysed period (2016-2023), the results related to sustainable livelihoods and social transformation emerged from 2020 onwards, forming a new trend. In contrast, there are very few projects whose results relate to the creation of sustainable enterprises.

   Another notable aspect is that in 2020 there was an increase in the number of results related to social transformation, sustainable livelihoods, and awareness of the need for environmental protection. This phenomenon is likely linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and the progressive worsening of the climate crisis. Additionally, there has also been a significant increase in results related to the protection and defence of territory, which may be due to greater awareness of these movements in the context of the systemic crisis, which has created many local tensions, especially with indigenous populations facing extractivist models.

4. Assessment of cooperation agents

This section addresses the incorporation of the environmental sustainability approach in development cooperation from a qualitative perspective. To do so, a double analysis was carried out based on the information collected from cooperation agents in Gipuzkoa. On the one hand, the information from a survey directed at the NGDOs in Gipuzkoa was analysed. On the other hand, the interviews carried out with different cooperation agents in Gipuzkoa were analysed, both with representatives of the NGDOs and with the different public administrations involved in the cooperation policy of the territory.

4.1. Survey of NGDOs

The survey "Environmental Sustainability in Cooperation in Gipuzkoa" consists of 5 control questions and 26 questions divided into three blocks (external elements, internal elements, and potentialities). The survey was sent via email to 76 NGDOs, all based in the Gipuzkoa territory, of which 26 organisations responded, giving a response rate of 34%. Although this is considered a sufficient response rate, a higher number would have been desirable for a more representative analysis. The survey collection period was just over a month, from November 2 to December 5, 2023.

The analysis is divided into the three blocks as outlined in the survey. According to the quantitative analysis conducted, the survey started from the premise that environmental sustainability is not sufficiently integrated into the projects of NGDOs. Therefore, questions were first posed about both the external and internal elements of the NGDOs that influence the incorporation of environmental sustainability in development cooperation. Questions were then asked about the potentialities regarding the incorporation of environmental sustainability in future development cooperation.

External elements

Awareness regarding the environmental crisis is one of the most important reasons for incorporating the perspective of environmental sustainability into projects. According to the NGDOs surveyed, this occurs both because society demands it (noted in 42% of cases) and because the organisations themselves are aware of the importance of this approach, in 81% of cases[3]. This awareness is reflected by the fact that the majority of organisations (54%) have incorporated this approach into their

3 Note that in the case of multiple responses, the sum of the percentage values may exceed 100%.

strategies and that it is the third most important focus for NGDOs, behind the focus on human rights and women's rights.

However, organisations do not attach much importance to **scoring** when incorporating the perspective of environmental sustainability into their projects, as only 6 out of the 26 organisations (23%) responded that the reason for including this approach is to achieve a higher score. In this regard, one of the organisations mentions that scoring is merely a condition of the content of the project being presented. We must not forget that the higher the score a project receives in its evaluation, the greater its chances of funding is, a circumstance that could lead organisations to adapt their discourse to obtain the highest possible number of points.

When asking NGDOs about their perception of the **DFG's Director Plan**, 54% indicate that the environmental sustainability approach is adequately included, considering that it also has to address multiple objectives. However, 23% of the organisations say that a change in discourse is necessary. It is worth noting that the Director Plan is based on the interpretive framework of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promoted by the United Nations.

This **paradigm** is deemed suitable by 31% of the organisations, while 54% believe that other more transformative discourses should be adopted. Thus, 65% of organisations think that work should be done to incorporate other discourses into Agenda 2030 so that it can address the systemic crisis and include the worldviews of the Global South. In fact, some statements from organisations support this view. One indicates that work needs to be done to construct a disruptive discourse that exists outside the capitalist system, so that this approach can be a priority and not limited to green actions that merely seek to mask the effects of the system. Another organisation adds to the critique of sustainability within the current model, arguing that it does not address the root causes of inequalities and the exploitation of natural resources, and that critical work is therefore needed around this paradigm. Nevertheless, 19% of organisations believe that the current framework is adequate.

Regarding the **inclusion of this approach**, 69% of NGDOs believe that the social and economic dimensions take precedence over the environmental dimension in the realm of cooperation, while 23% disagree. However, the reasons for considering this relegation of the environmental approach vary. In 11% of cases, it is argued that this is because the environmental approach is not as important as the well-being of people; in the remaining cases, it is because the current development model and the way projects are assessed prioritise economic and social factors over environmental ones. Conversely, for Southern partners, environmental sustainability

is a priority, as 79% of organisations estimate that Southern partners work with this approach; only 15% of organisations believe that the counterparts have other priorities. The approach is more prominently integrated into EpTS projects, as 54% of the NGDOs surveyed find it easier to work on environmental sustainability in these transformative projects, and for another 31%, this approach is more easily incorporated in education projects.

Finally, one of the most significant external limitations is the lack of support from **public administrations**, as 69% state that all they do is establish and enact the regulatory framework.

Internal elements

Regarding the **content** of the projects, the survey aimed to understand the approaches that NGDOs work with, the actions they carry out, and whether the expected results are achieved. In terms of approaches, the most important are human rights and women's rights, with 85% of the responses, while 42% work with the environmental sustainability approach (note that more than one approach can be addressed simultaneously). This latter approach is included transversally in 81% of cases, while 23% include it in isolated actions, 31% in sectoral actions, and 15% as a primary objective. This indicates that the environmental sustainability approach is important to the organisations.

The actions within this approach are primarily categorised into three types: awareness and education actions (27%), agroecology actions (23%), and territory defence (15%). In some cases, actions of a different nature are carried out, although this is somewhat exceptional. Finally, regarding the expected results, most organisations state that these are met, but three admit that measuring them is complicated.

For the organisations, the **reasons** cited for including or excluding the perspective of environmental sustainability are diverse. Among the reasons for excluding the environmental sustainability approach are those of unclear regulations (35%), difficulty in including the approach in assessment criteria (35%), and insufficient funding (31%); these are mainly political and/or administrative reasons. However, the lack of awareness among the target population (27%) is a less prominent reason, which may relate to the lower likelihood of it being addressed. Conversely, the main reasons for including this approach are that the majority of organisations have it included in their strategic plan (69%) and ethical reasons (50%). On the other hand, political and/or administrative reasons, such as international agendas, the

Master Plan, assessment criteria, and environmental legislation, are not considered very important. One organisation stated that not all approaches should be included in project assessments because this could result in sectoral projects receiving lower scores, potentially leaving them without funding.

Regarding the interpretive frameworks or **paradigms** followed by organisations, the most important is sustainable human development (54%), followed by Agenda 2030 and the SDGs (46%), ecofeminism (46%), and defence of territory and human rights (46%). Alongside these, there are other more transformative paradigms that are gaining traction, such as the sustainability of life (35%) and (socio)environmental justice (35%). Additionally, two organisations highlight certain issues in this regard: one advocates for a disruptive paradigm, the Rights of Nature, arguing that other paradigms seek the sustainability of the economic system but not that of the planet; the second emphasises that traditional discourses in cooperation are deeply ingrained and argues that countries in the Global South still need to grow economically.

Most organisations receive **training** in this area with varying frequency, and the majority have someone on their **staff specialised** in environmental sustainability, either as a worker or as a collaborator.

Potentialities

The **desire for change** within the organisations is clear, as 71% are working to incorporate environmental sustainability more significantly into their activities, while 27% believe they already adequately include this perspective. In this regard, 27% of the organisations think that this change is appropriate, while 46% believe that a change is necessary.

For a transformation towards environmental sustainability to occur, the organisations expressed the following **elements of change**: greater training (46%), facilitating partnerships and networks with other organisations (46%), and increased funding for projects (42%). One of the NGDOs emphasises that the classic cooperation system paradigm must be changed to one based on the Rights of Nature, both within organisations and in administration as well as education. Additionally, 81% of organisations believe that environmental training is necessary because it is a competence for the future or because it would help implement more and better projects. Only two organisations feel they have sufficient knowledge in the area of environmental sustainability.

Crucial issues related to sustainability, such as **energy and natural resources**, are not sufficiently addressed, and organisations attribute this to three main reasons: Agenda 2030 and the SDGs do not treat them as priorities but, rather, as other areas to act upon (31%), the lack of technical preparation among NGDOs (27%), and the fact that they are pursued through isolated actions (27%).

Other issues highlighted by some organisations include the following. On the one hand, the knowledge that the organisations possess is valued, and it is acknowledged that it would be interesting to share this knowledge with other organisations, even those from different fields. On the other hand, it is also emphasised that all the work organisations do in cooperation will have no value if there is no effort towards the coherence of public policies, as while cooperation efforts aim for environmental sustainability, some companies continue to violate nature.

4.2. Interviews with cooperation agents

The interviews conducted with organisations and public administrations also consist of three parts: external elements, internal elements, and potentialities. The interviews aimed, on the one hand, to delve deeper into some issues addressed in the surveys and, on the other hand, to explore other qualitative aspects that were not resolved through the surveys directed at the NGDOs. The interview script varied depending on whether it was directed at organisations or public administrations. As indicated in Section 2, interviews were conducted with 6 organisations and 3 different public administrations. These interviews took place between the second half of November and the first half of December 2023.

External elements

The **organisations** interviewed acknowledged that the presence of the environmental perspective in project content has grown over time, although the reasons cited vary. All organisations argue that both the NGDOs themselves and the target populations, from both the North and the South, have a greater environmental awareness, which drives the presence of this perspective. The populations in the South have significantly influenced this incorporation of the perspective, as they come from worldviews where the environment holds great importance (I2, I3, I5, I6)[4], although the awareness of the populations of the North has also been relevant (I1, I4, I5, I6).

4 In order to be methodologically rigorous, interview codes are specified where appropriate (I1, I2, etc.).

Unlike what was gathered in the survey, several organisations pointed out that the **change in the evaluation criteria** of projects towards a greater environmental focus has driven changes in project content, due to the influence this has on many organisations when it comes to securing funding (I2, I4, I5, I6). However, they do not specify to what extent this change in evaluation influences them, as for many organisations it is merely a guideline for determining which aspects of the projects to prioritise (I7). Since evaluation is a determining factor in project design, any change in the evaluation criteria should be accompanied by training to achieve the intended goals (I1, I2). Furthermore, any change in the evaluation criteria is not necessarily suitable for promoting the environmental sustainability focus (I6); the process that occurred with the gender focus, which is considered positive as it achieved its mainstreaming, can serve as an experience in this regard (I4).

The positions of organisations regarding **Agenda 2030** as a condition for including the environmental perspective can be classified into four stances: (1) a starting point for incorporating the concept of sustainability (I1); (2) a *red line* that cannot be crossed (I3); (3) a paradigm that helps justify development cooperation projects but must be complemented with more disruptive paradigms (I4, I5, I6); and (4) a stagnant paradigm that cannot serve as a reference and must be replaced by more disruptive ones for true change (I2).

Similar to the survey, in the interviews, we find a stance regarding the dimensions of **sustainable development** where one case indicates that there are more pressing issues than the ecological crisis (I1); the rest of the organisations acknowledge the need to promote the environmental dimension (I2, I4, I5, I6), although one warns that it should not be done at the expense of economic and social problems (I3). They also point out various ways to promote environmental sustainability: through structural change (I2), transforming the development model and addressing the impacts of companies on the environmental crisis (I5); working according to other development paradigms that go beyond Agenda 2030 (I5); and aligning with the vision that the dimensions of development depend on the ecological dimension (I6).

The perspectives on the **dimensions** are reflected in the way priorities are established. Those NGDOs that perceive the environmental dimension as dependent on the economic and social dimensions believe that priority should be given to solving problems of a different nature, such as armed conflicts and their effects (I1). In another case, it is thought that administrations should better regulate the activities of other agents with a greater environmental impact, such as transnational companies (I3). Conversely, organisations with more extensive

environmental experience believe that promoting environmental sustainability is not incompatible with simultaneously addressing social and economic problems, so elements of the environmental dimension can be included in projects with other objectives (I2, I4, I5, I6).

These perspectives are reflected in how the environmental approach is included. One organisation reinforces the opinion that in the current context, with pressing social issues, it is not feasible to work on incorporating the environmental perspective (I1). From another viewpoint, there is advocacy for creating a specific cooperation tool that would allow the environmental perspective to be included (I4), or even establishing separate calls for different types of projects (I3). Some argue that projects cannot include a multitude of perspectives and simultaneously have a real environmental impact, so there should be a way of avoiding transversalising too many issues in a single project (I6). However, there are organisations working to ensure that projects do integrate the environmental approach (I2), and even from the perspective of environmental justice where life and nature are central elements (I5).

Organisations follow different strategies in the Global North and South for various reasons. On the one hand, populations in the South need economic growth to address their problems, while in the North there is no need for growth, hence different strategies are pursued (I1). Other organisations offer a similar view but believe that the local context should be considered rather than a strict differentiation between North and South (I4, I5, I6). Still, they advocate working in all contexts to achieve sustainable growth (I4). Some argue that projects should adapt to the worldviews of each region without needing to distinguish between North and South (I6), and even highlight the Rights of Nature as a paradigm that could bridge a common vision between North and South (I2). Lastly, there is a recurring emphasis on addressing transnational corporations, which, although primarily based in the North, cause their effects mainly in the South (I3).

Public administrations also acknowledge that there are external factors preventing the promotion of environmental sustainability. One of these is European regulations, which prioritise economic aspects over environmental ones (I7). Another challenge is the structure of the administration itself, as bureaucracy increases the workload and prevents focus on improving aspects related to cooperation projects (I8). Additionally, administrative employees lack sufficient training on this approach (I8, I9), especially in how to integrate it into activities not directly related to environmental sustainability (I9). However, the main issue is the lack of political will within the administrations (I7, I8, I9).

Although the environmental approach remains somewhat marginal in the cooperation sector, as previously analysed, public administrations have begun working to include this approach in other areas of their work not directly related to the environment (I7, I8, I9). Despite progress, they still face challenges with some local partners when addressing this approach (I9). However, they are starting to explore disruptive concepts (e.g., linking the body with the land), though there are sectors where incorporating environmental concepts is still difficult (I9).

As previously analysed, administrations generally use Agenda 2030 and SDGs as the conceptual framework for their planning. One administration believes that this framework prioritises the environmental dimension, and this is reflected in the administration's overall activities, as various departments share this vision (I7). It also acknowledges that, although the conceptual framework could be improved, it is currently a good reference point. However, other administrations, despite the universality of the Agenda, find it difficult to apply this paradigm to local contexts, which is why they complement it with other frameworks and perspectives (I8, I9). Despite the criticisms, it is also acknowledged that this paradigm has successfully linked sustainability with development and has helped establish the North's responsibility for global problems.

An alternative paradigm to the hegemonic development model is degrowth. One administration acknowledges that economic degrowth may be valid for the North, but not for the South, which has not yet achieved sufficient well-being (I7). Others share a similar view, indicating that each territory has its own pace and that this cannot be imposed (I8), and that the North, which has appropriated the resources of the South, cannot dictate how the South should behave (I9). Furthermore, the diverse worldviews in the South protect the environment, so no vision should be imposed from the North (I7), a point reinforced by the fact that the North continues to support extractive industries (I8). Projects must adapt to local contexts, as, on the one hand, not all contexts aim for economic growth as it is understood in the North, and on the other hand, some projects do not have productive elements, so in those cases, the North-South dichotomy would not apply (I9).

Internal elements

In line with what has already been mentioned, for the majority of **NGDOs**, Agenda 2030 is not considered an adequate **conceptual framework**, and thus several organisations do not take it into account when designing projects (I2, I6), opting to work with other perspectives instead (I2). However, some organisations use it as an

institutional reference to justify their projects but complement this paradigm with others (I3, I5). One organisation sees an additional issue, considering it too broad a conceptual framework, making it difficult to fully address in projects, so they only engage with parts of it (I1).

As a result, organisations incorporate environmental sustainability in various ways. In some cases, organisations do not change the conceptual framework on which their projects are based but include environmental elements, whether from Agenda 2030 (I4) or more disruptive theories such as ecofeminism, degrowth, and strong sustainability (I6). In other cases, they work from paradigms different from Agenda 2030 but in a complementary way: environmental justice (I3), socio-environmental justice (I5), and caring for the common home (I5). Finally, there are projects that work with alternative and disruptive paradigms: Rights of Nature (I2), Buen Vivir objectives (I2), and ecofeminism (I2, I5).

A proposal for a paradigm shift is not easy in the case of projects competing for public funding, which is why, in many cases, only environmental **actions** are included. As mentioned, some organisations mainstream environmental sustainability into their activities (I2, I5), while others, when they cannot mainstream this approach, try to use other frameworks, such as the SSE (I4). In addition to mainstreaming the approach, some organisations also work to address the root causes of the environmental crisis (I5). Others, instead of mainstreaming the approach, choose to adapt the project to the local context and available resources, as the more control the stakeholders have over the project, the more sustainable it is (I6). However, some NGDOs do not always include these types of elements; one organisation only does so when required by the partner (I3), and another admits that they lack the necessary resources (I1).

The type of action also depends on whether they are international cooperation projects or EpTS projects. The nature of EpTS projects makes it challenging to include actions beyond training (I1, I2, I5), but some organisations incorporate alternative worldviews to break with the current development model in these projects (I2). Among the non-training actions are forest recovery initiatives (I1) and efforts in awareness-raising, research, and political advocacy (I5). In the case of international cooperation projects, organisations face difficulties in including environmental actions due to a lack of knowledge, although some attempts are made: workshops on ecological cooking, denunciations of territorial and land rights violations, and training (I3). However, there are also organisations with sufficient knowledge to carry out projects of any kind where the environmental approach is mainstreamed: health or women's empowerment (I2); food security, strengthening institutions, or

women's empowerment (I4); and water sanitation, training and capacity building, promotion of economic activities, or political advocacy (I6). Some organisations even conduct environmental impact studies to analyse how to reduce the impact of their projects (I4).

Even so, organisations acknowledge difficulties in **measuring the environmental outcomes** of their projects (I1, I3, I5). Many projects aim for long-term impact and, therefore, it is considered necessary to develop a framework that facilitates the measurement of long-term environmental results (I2), even in projects with other primary goals (I4).

In general, organisations do not show much interest in training on the environmental approach. Some say they do not need more **training** overall (I3, I4, I5), although they also admit they would participate in hands-on training where positive experiences in environmental sustainability inclusion are shared (I4, I5). Others are interested in training that emphasises a disruptive paradigm rather than the dominant one, and that even includes alternative worldviews (I2, I6). These training sessions should aim to address organisational problems and meet their needs (I5).

Most organisations would welcome the creation of a **platform** to share knowledge and experiences among different stakeholders. A reference point is a similar platform focused on the SSE, which has been successful, and it is believed that something similar for the environmental approach would be valuable (I1). The organisations made various suggestions for this hypothetical platform (I2, I4, I5, I6), believing that it could: encourage reflection, serve as a resource bank for sharing; provide a space for sharing best practices and experiences to improve actions in the sector, and function as a network of organisations monitoring environmental sustainability in cooperation, similar to an international network on mining.

Like the NGDOs, **public administrations** also highlight the challenges in measuring project **outcomes**. Some administrations lack sufficient resources and also question the current methods used, noting that travelling by plane to project sites to measure results may not be the best approach (I8). They also point out that climate awareness has increased, although this has not led to the expected reduction in environmental impacts, making it a future challenge to effectively reduce those impacts (I9).

Regarding the **scoring** criteria related to the environmental focus, one administration emphasises its importance and the need to include it as a mandatory element (I7). However, another administration adds that changes in scoring criteria are problematic for NGDOs, as they are forced to adapt their methods of operation

(I9). They suggest that these changes in criteria should be accompanied by training to ensure they are effective and achieve the intended objectives.

One of the administrations acknowledges that the cooperation sector is receiving less public funding, making it difficult to offer any kind of training (I7). Another administration not only complains about the lack of funding but also highlights that they do not have the time to prepare or attend any form of training (I8).

Regarding the creation of a **platform** for sharing knowledge, Gipuzkoa already has the Cooperation Table, where different challenges related to cooperation are addressed, and efforts are underway to redesign its functioning to facilitate these kinds of discussions. The Basque Government also has similar platforms: an annual space where cooperation challenges are shared, although environmental issues have not been a priority to date. Additionally, the Basque Government has a Steering Committee in which different departments participate, although both cooperation and environmental sustainability have little relevance in this. The Euskadi NGDO Coordinator also promotes spaces for knowledge sharing. The administrations believe that there is no need to create new platforms, given the existence of some that already serve this purpose (I7, I9), and note that some NGDOs are already promoting similar initiatives.

Regarding **public funds**, one administration points out that the funding allocated to cooperation in general is steadily decreasing. For this reason, it is working with other departments to carry out projects in the field of cooperation, which greatly complicates its mission (I7). For municipal and regional administrations, increasing funding is not decisive for including the environmental perspective or creating a specific funding line; instead, they believe it is necessary to continue advocating for multidimensional projects that integrate the environmental approach (I8, I9). Additionally, they emphasise the need for training to properly mainstream the environmental perspective into projects (I9).

Potentialities

Lastly, we analyse how to improve the cooperation sector in order to integrate environmental sustainability. In this regard, the **organisations** made a series of **proposals**, which are summarised below:

- Promote training, although the paradigm addressed must be disruptive in order to be truly effective.

- Promote the mainstreaming of the approach and its neccesity to grant funding. Use the knowledge of the organisations themselves to integrate mainstreaming.
- Create knowledge networks with agents outside the cooperation sector to obtain the necessary knowledge so that it can be used to mainstream the environmental approach in cooperation.
- Promote a paradigm shift to mainstream the environmental approach.
- Implement the approach of coherence of public policies in other areas of public administration, so that efforts in one area are not limited by those in other areas.
- An internal diagnosis of the organisations to identify the weaknesses in the inclusion of the environmental approach.

The organisations also made a number of **proposals** addressed to the **DFG**:

- More training to have a more effective impact in the environmental field.
- Work to include more disruptive paradigms such as the Rights of Nature and promote ancestral knowledge.
- Commit to cooperation through greater funding of activities and projects.
- Create instruments with greater impact; sufficient and longer-term funding.
- Promote the vision of coherent public policies in the different areas of administration.
- Address the activity of transnational companies, which are the ones that can have a real impact in dealing with environmental degradation.
- Critically examine digitalisation and green capitalism.

Another point is that project **funding calls** generally distinguish between projects in the Global North and the Global South. As long as the calls remain structured this way, the North-South dichotomy will not disappear (I3, I5). In this vein, there is even a proposal to create a tool for designing global strategies (I5). In fact, project activities must be adapted to the specific conditions of each location, making it impossible to act the same way everywhere (I4, I5, I6). However, part of the projects can be unified on a sectoral basis, such as in education or the water sector (I6).

Regarding the limited intervention in the **energy and natural resources** sectors, these are considered global sectors, while cooperation projects typically focus on

micro-level sectors, making it difficult to address these areas (I4). Additionally, more resources would be required to do so (I5). Another challenge is raising awareness about the effects of these activities (I6). Some organisations include occasional actions related to these sectors, and there are even efforts to foster a critical citizenry about such activities. There is also a move towards acting in these sectors on a micro-level, for example by creating energy communities (I4). Meanwhile, one organisation participates in an international network for political advocacy in the mining sector, but it is challenging to have a significant impact (I5). Finally, one organisation acknowledges that in order to have a real impact in these sectors, NGDOs must work with companies operating in these industries (I6).

Lastly, organisations conclude that the effects of the environmental crisis are palpable in the Global South. In the South, the impacts of the climate crisis are more severe and increasingly frequent, highlighting the need to take action as soon as possible (I4, I5, I6).

The **administrations** also addressed the differences in how to act in the North and the South. One administration acknowledges that they are working to bridge both contexts through EpTS projects (I8). The (H)ABIAN strategy, for its part, seeks to connect EpTS projects with various institutions to ensure that all initiatives move in the same direction (I9).

Administrations also admit difficulties when addressing issues related to **energy and natural resources**. One administration admits that they do not work in these areas, although they are starting to be more mindful of the materials used in projects (I7). Another administration stresses the need to address these issues, acknowledging that work on them has begun on a small scale. However, it warns that local counterparts may face challenges in implementing such actions due to a lack of sufficient knowledge (I9).

Policy coherence is an issue that is addressed on paper but has recently begun to be worked on jointly through several projects with other departments (I7). One administration has attempted to work in this direction but admits that no significant progress has been made (I9). The cooperation department of this administration is weak in terms of resources compared to other departments that do not address environmental sustainability, despite these departments having the resources to drive real change in sustainability.

The administrations also acknowledge that the commitment to allocate **0.7% of public budgets** to cooperation is not being met (I7, I8). None of the administrations

achieve this goal, and the percentage is decreasing each year. In their opinion, only a genuine political push would change this situation.

Finally, the administrations identified a series of **future challenges** aimed at better integrating environmental sustainability into cooperation efforts, which are summarised below:

- Work with other departments to develop projects that address the environmental approach.
- Monitor projects to measure their results.
- Address citizen disaffection.
- Provide greater temporal and financial stability to projects.
- Develop guidelines on how to integrate the environmental approach in all types of projects, which will help both the organisations that design the projects and the administrations that assess them.

5. Results

This section presents the main results along with a general assessment of the integration of environmental sustainability into development cooperation in Gipuzkoa. Additionally, a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is conducted, with the matrix highlighting the most significant elements of the findings and overall evaluation.

5.1. Results and general evaluation

Cooperation is currently in a period of transition, marked by an interdependent global context subject to constant changes, including ecological and climatic transformations. This is reflected in the newly approved **Law 3/2024 on Cooperation and Solidarity**, which, in its preamble and articles, incorporates significant elements aimed at giving ecological and sustainability issues greater prominence in Basque cooperation. This signals a shift towards a discourse where socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice are more central. There is also a noticeable move towards a stronger commitment to the coherence of public policies, which should help reinforce its ecological dimension.

This more environmentally focused discourse in the law, along with the efforts of numerous NGDOs and some public administrations, are valuable factors for an "ecological transformation of cooperation." It is also important to highlight the experience and resilience of Basque NGDOs and the broader cooperation sector in leading initiatives and transformations, which should also be an asset when addressing ecological and sustainability challenges. This is all happening despite the apparent public disengagement with cooperation and the fact that this transformative discourse is not yet being supported by other regulations or planning instruments.

Agenda 2030 and the SDGs connect the various dimensions of development, with a multidimensional as well as universal approach. However, in terms of ecology and sustainability, the SDGs present contradictions due to the theoretical and even empirical inconsistency involved in achieving different objectives simultaneously. The principle of "weak sustainability" also prevails, where gains in the economic dimension can compensate for setbacks in the environmental one. The most obvious example is SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), which in terms of growth contradicts environmental SDGs, such as SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water). The emphasis on SDG 8 ultimately supports the continuation of the hegemonic development model,

which, through the pursuit of continuous economic growth, also contributes to the global ecological and climate crisis.

Gipuzkoa's regulations and planning instruments take Agenda 2030 and the SDGs as their main reference. While environmental sustainability has gained more prominence in recent years, there is still room for a greater integration of this approach into the region's regulatory and planning framework. However, the principle of weak sustainability underlies these frameworks, which in practice means that the economic and social dimensions take precedence over the environmental, a situation that is seen as a weakness from an ecological perspective. Another notable shortcoming is that both the Strategic Framework and the Master Plan fail to mainstream environmental sustainability, despite its increasing importance in the field of cooperation. Lastly, while the regulatory foundations for grant allocations have made progress in integrating environmental sustainability into cooperation projects, its consideration since 2016 has been more formal than substantive.

The overall impression is that Gipuzkoa's regulations and planning instruments should integrate environmental sustainability in a more cross-cutting manner. They should also incorporate a disruptive discourse if the intention is to align with a vision advocating for socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice. In this regard, the aforementioned Law 3/2024 presents an opportunity to be used as a reference or at least as a source of inspiration.

Regarding **public funds** allocated to cooperation, it is important to highlight that they are currently far from the 0.7% target, a figure representing a long-standing ambition of the cooperation sector. Law 3/2024 on Cooperation and Solidarity also establishes in Article 16.3 that the General Budget of the CAPV must annually allocate at least 0.7% of its total expenditure to cooperation and solidarity policies. To provide an illustrative example, in 2022 the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (DFG) allocated 0.08% of its total executed budget to cooperation projects; meanwhile, the Department of Culture, Cooperation, Youth and Sports, the DFG's branch responsible for this area, allocated 8.24% of its executed budget[5]. However, this is a widespread issue, not only occurring within the DFG but also in other administrations, even outside the CAPV.

5 The funds allocated by the DFG in 2022 for cooperation projects amounted to 4,848,156 euros, while the executed budgets of the Department of Culture, Cooperation, Youth and Sports and the DFG as a whole were, respectively, 58.8 million and 5.888 billion euros. See **https://www.gipuzkoa.eus/es/diputacion/presupuestos-2020-2022** [last accessed on 15/05/2024].

Regarding the consideration of environmental sustainability, the analysis of public funds shows that the conclusions are quite similar across all areas examined (CAPV, AAPP, DFG, and NGDOs in Gipuzkoa). First, the most notable finding is that the sector of General Environmental Protection (DAC code 410), which is most directly related to environmental sustainability, has a minimal presence, not even exceeding 1% of total funds. This is a clear indication that cooperation is largely removed from biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services, both of which are crucial for environmental sustainability.

Secondly, projects prioritising environmental sustainability are relatively scarce, representing between 10% and 15% in all areas studied, and for the DFG, this is only 5%. Moreover, these percentages are mainly concentrated in the sectors of Water Supply and Sanitation (DAC 140) and Agriculture (DAC 311), which may include projects that are not necessarily sustainable. This suggests that the actual percentage of funds dedicated to environmentally sustainable initiatives is likely even lower.

Lastly, the projects in the "Unallocated" sector (DAC 998) and the "Government and Civil Society" sector (DAC 151) account for around 60% across all the areas analysed, which is a significant figure. Unlike the previous sectors, these may include environmentally sustainable projects, but due to a lack of information, it has not been possible to analyse the content of these projects.

In summary, all of the above suggests that environmental sustainability is not a priority in terms of the funds allocated to the sectors examined.

Regarding the analysis of the **content of the Cooperation projects** submitted to the DFG's calls for proposals, the results are as follows. On the one hand, the trend can be considered positive, as environmental sustainability has had a growing presence since 2016, likely aided by the change in evaluation criteria in 2020, which appears to have influenced whether a project is approved or not. However, there is still considerable room for improvement in incorporating environmental sustainability, as this approach is neither integrated across most projects nor their main focus.

On the other hand, projects with an environmental sustainability approach generally do not differ from *non-environmental* projects, as they also aim to ensure social development and address inequalities and poverty. Nevertheless, the majority of projects, whether or not they incorporate an environmental sustainability approach, identify environmental issues as one of the greatest current challenges in cooperation, although this concern is not always equally reflected in their activities.

Finally, it is worth noting that the differences between field-based Cooperation projects and EpTS projects, attributable to the inherent nature of each, result in very different activities being carried out in each type of project. EpTS projects also tend to incorporate environmental sustainability to a greater extent than Cooperation projects, as in many cases this approach is included as a primary objective.

The analysis of the **survey conducted with NGDOs and the interviews with public administrations** reveals some relevant findings on how to promote environmental sustainability. First, organisations do not attach much importance to the environmental requirement in project evaluation criteria; instead, they place greater emphasis on their own environmental awareness, which is also reflected in the strategies of the NGDOs. Therefore, it can be inferred that, rather than advocating for further modifications to the evaluation criteria, the most important focus should be on continuing to raise awareness.

Secondly, social and economic priorities generally take precedence over environmental concerns, as it is believed that dimensions other than the environmental have a greater impact on people's well-being. However, NGDOs with more extensive experience in environmental issues believe that promoting environmental sustainability is not incompatible with simultaneously addressing social and economic problems. Some organisations envision that real change in ecological and sustainability terms would come alongside a shift in the cooperation model; nevertheless, there are still organisations that believe the current conceptual framework of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs is appropriate. Additionally, the organisations themselves acknowledge that there are priority approaches other than environmental sustainability, such as women's rights and human rights.

In third place, the lack of actions of this nature is partly due to a lack of knowledge on how to integrate environmental sustainability into projects, either because of insufficient knowledge or because the funding calls themselves do not clearly establish how to address it. However, organisations have demonstrated an interest in improving their activities in terms of environmental sustainability, although they require training to help integrate this approach, a network of alliances with different cooperation agents, and increased funding to incorporate as many approaches outlined in the regulations as possible.

Finally, a future challenge is to address the issue of using energy and natural resources within the framework of cooperation, given their importance in terms of impacts and environmental sustainability. It is, therefore, a key issue that should probably be approached differently, as the current cooperation model has not integrated it

coherently. Furthermore, the importance of energy and natural resources in terms of sustainability transcends the scope of cooperation and also affects the coherence of public policies introduced by the administrations.

5.2. SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) presented here complements the diagnostic work carried out and the general assessment just outlined. This analysis also aims to assist in decision-making and planning for the cooperation sector in Gipuzkoa. The SWOT matrix (Table 14) succinctly summarises the main elements derived from the analysis conducted.

Table 14. SWOT Matrix (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Positive disposition among cooperation agents towards greater integration of environmental sustainability. • Awareness of the relevance of ecological issues among NGDOs. • A group of NGDOs with experience in the sector and resilience. • Significant presence of the environmental sustainability approach in EpTS projects .	• Scarcity of public funds allocated to cooperation in general. • Lack of funds dedicated to environmental projects. • Limited sectoral diversity in the orientation of public funds. • Insufficient environmental mainstreaming in cooperation projects. • Lack of technical knowledge in the ecological and sustainability fields. • Apparent lack of relationship between NGDOs and environmental organisations. • Inertia in prioritising socioeconomic needs of the Global South. • Absence of a collective space for reflection in the sector on ecological and sustainability issues.

Opportunities	Threats
• New scenario opened by Law 3/2024 in at least three areas: (1) renewed discourse; (2) funding; (3) role of the public sector. • Explicit environmental awareness from the territories of the Global South. • Discourse and orientation of the Strategic Plan of the Coordinator of NGDOs. • Leadership and forefront of transformative ideas in the cooperation sector of the CAPV. • Adoption of transformative postulates by some NGDOs.	• Perception that the global ecological crisis is linked to issues outside the realm of cooperation (e.g., energy, natural resources, climate change, etc.). • The cooperation system does not adequately address the unequal ecological relationships between the Global North and South. • Very few counterparts among NGDOs from the Global South specialised in environmental sustainability. • Limitations of Agenda 2030 in addressing the global ecological crisis. • Lack of coherence in public policies regarding environmental issues.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This section presents the conclusions of the analysis carried out, as well as a series of recommendations aimed at integrating environmental sustainability into the guidelines and cooperation policy of Gipuzkoa.

6.1. Conclusions

The diagnostic analysis conducted reveals that the **degree of integration of environmental sustainability** in the development cooperation of Gipuzkoa is **very limited**. This low level of integration clashes with the significant challenges posed by ecological and sustainability issues, both globally and locally. Therefore, if the cooperation policy of Gipuzkoa aims to address these challenges, it must transform from an ecological and sustainability perspective.

The following are specific conclusions based on the different areas of analysis addressed.

The regulatory and planning framework

- The regulations regarding the CAPV have made significant progress. In particular, Law 3/24, dated February 15, on Cooperation and Solidarity presents a much more ambitious approach to environmental sustainability than its predecessor. However, it is still too early to assess its effectiveness, and it remains to be seen whether its implementation will bring about change in this regard.

- The presence of environmental sustainability in the planning instruments of both the CAPV and Gipuzkoa is generally quite marginal. The environmental approach is not integrated across the board and, furthermore, environmental sustainability is aligned with the principle of weak sustainability. These documents are therefore conceived based on a limited discourse that does not enable significant transformations regarding environmental sustainability and the current ecological and sustainability challenges.

- Environmental sustainability is more prominently featured in the Strategic Plan of the Coordinator of NGDOs of the Basque Country, which advocates for a discourse around the Rights of Nature.

- Environmental sustainability has gained importance in the Regulatory bases for grant allocation by the DFG for the period 2016-2023, but its presence remains marginal.

Public funds allocated to cooperation

- The funds allocated to environmental sustainability within the framework of cooperation in Gipuzkoa during the period 2016-2022 are very limited. The funds specifically allocated to Environmental Protection (DAC code 410) do not exceed 1% of the total across all analysed areas.

- The funds allocated to DAC code projects with an environmental perspective are scarce across all analysed areas. The relative weights of the total funds are as follows: (1) 15.4% allocated by the public administrations of the CAPV; (2) 10.2% allocated by the public administrations of Gipuzkoa; (3) 12.9% allocated by the public administrations of the CAPV to NGDOs in Gipuzkoa; and (4) 4.9% allocated by the DFG.

- The funds for DAC codes with an environmental perspective are sectorally concentrated in Water Supply and Sanitation (DAC 140) and Agriculture (DAC 311). Regarding the total of DAC code projects with an environmental perspective, both DAC codes jointly account for over 90% of the funds across all analysed areas.

The direction and scope of cooperation projects

- The orientation and scope of Cooperation projects regarding environmental sustainability is generally quite limited. In terms of project focus, environmental sustainability is not transversal nor does it constitute a primary objective in most projects.

- Cooperation projects with an environmental sustainability perspective are not that different, nor do they have significantly different objectives, from those of another nature but, rather, like most projects, they aim to combat poverty and inequalities and ensure social development.

- Environmental sustainability is more present in EpTS projects than in Cooperation projects, although its relative importance concerning the total number of projects is also not very prominent.

The assessment of cooperation agents

- The assessment of cooperation agents generally supports the conclusions reached regarding the limited integration of environmental sustainability. This

is indicated by the analysis of both external and internal factors that condition that integration.

- However, there are various potentials for integrating environmental sustainability into the development cooperation of Gipuzkoa, which present numerous future challenges.

- Overall, both NGDOs and public administrations show a significant willingness to change towards greater integration and strengthening of environmental sustainability in cooperation.

6.2. Recommendations

The recommendations for greater integration and strengthening of environmental sustainability in the cooperation of Gipuzkoa are as follows:

- Capitalise on Law 3/2024, of February 15, on Cooperation and Solidarity, whose **framework provides an opportunity to strengthen** actions related to socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice, primarily for three reasons:

    1. It maintains a more transformative discourse in terms of socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice, as it confronts the hegemonic development model, which is responsible for the ecological crisis in the form of climate change, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, etc.

    2. It sets at least 0.7% of the total expenditure annually of the General Budget of the CAPV towards cooperation and solidarity policies (art. 16.3). Thus, it provides the option for other administrations to follow this path, creating a window of opportunity to allocate more funds to initiatives, projects, etc., aimed at strengthening socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice.

    3. It grants significant importance to public administration, with a particular emphasis on the coherence of public policies for sustainable development.

- **Adjustment of the Development Cooperation Master Plan of the DFG 2021-2030** to current sector trends and the socio-ecological and political transformations occurring globally. Moreover, there are still several years until 2030, the year the current Master Plan concludes, making this adjustment even

more urgent. Additionally, the regulations and/or strategic planning of other institutions and entities can serve as a reference in this task.

- **The evaluation of projects** in socio-ecological terms and environmental justice should be adjusted to any possible changes and/or adjustments that may arise from the revision of the Master Plan.

- **Allocate more public funds** to finance cooperation projects and EpTS that prioritise socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice. A reference could be made to allocate 0.7% of the public budget annually to cooperation expenditure, as indicated by Law 3/24. In any case, this could serve as an incentive to make greater headway in this direction.

- Creation of a specific cooperation **project line** aimed at socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice. Its design and implementation could draw from previous experiences, such as that of the Barcelona City Council. This project line would ensure that actions in the field of socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice are carried out, thus preventing such projects from having to compete in general calls for proposals, where their presence has been limited. Furthermore, for greater impact, its implementation should not be limited to the work of NGDOs but should open up opportunities for organisations specialising in ecological and sustainability issues to participate.

- Promotion of **projects** with a **complementary agent configuration.** This coordinated work among agents would contribute to strengthening the presence of the environmental approach by incorporating specialised knowledge in both the cooperation and sustainability sectors. Two project modalities are considered**:**

    1. *Tandem* project, whose original idea comes from the City Council of Vitoria-Gasteiz. This type of project would consist of two or more organisations with complementary *expertise*. On the one hand, an NGDO that would provide knowledge and experience in cooperation, and on the other, a public or private organisation specialising in ecological and sustainability issues.

    2. Technical cooperation project, in which the public administration offers its technical knowledge in various areas (water supply, waste management, agriculture, etc.) to NGDOs.

- **Promote projects with a longer duration**. Annual linked projects could be initiated, such as projects spanning three or four years, with verifiable annual funding that could be extended based on the achievement of objectives set each year. This longer project duration would contribute to both the continuity of actions and their effectiveness, and would even provide greater opportunities for assessing the impacts generated by the projects.

- Develop a methodological framework for *ex-post* **environmental impact assessment** of projects. Such an instrument could enable evaluations in two ways: (a) estimating the environmental improvements brought about by development projects whose primary purpose is socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice; (b) estimating the environmental impacts arising from activities linked to any project, with the goal of raising awareness and reducing this impact through corrective measures in the future.

- **Extract learnings from projects** considered benchmarks due to their contributions in the field of sustainability. To do this, specific sustainability-oriented Cooperation projects and EpTS should first be identified. After their evaluation, reflections and learnings could be drawn that might contribute to the integration of a sustainability approach.

- Offer **specific training courses** for both NGDOs and public administration staff. For up-to-date learning, this training should address socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice within the framework of cooperation, in line with current debates. It should also cover both theoretical-interpretative and practical issues, particularly concerning project formulation, development and evaluation.

- Enhance a **collective reflection space** through dialogue and experience-sharing among different stakeholders. The Gipuzkoa Cooperation Table could serve as a meeting space to promote collective reflection on socio-ecological sustainability and environmental justice. This could be achieved through organising seminars, talks, workshops, etc., ultimately serving for joint reflection on this matter.

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